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The Politician

By Edith
Huntington
Mason

Gift of
Senator Ernest Lundeen



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THE POLITICIAN



"Isn't that sacrificing too much?"

[Page 151]

THE POLITICIAN

BY

Edith Huntington Mason

Author of "The Real Agatha"

ILLUSTRATED IN FULL COLOR

BY THE KINNEYS

SECOND EDITION



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To E. P. P.

**WHOSE FRIENDSHIP HAS MADE IT
POSSIBLE FOR ME TO WRITE THIS BOOK**



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CHAPTER I

AFTER FOUR YEARS

THE first warm days of June held the city in their grasp, and the far-famed lake breeze was traitorously absent from the streets. Yet in spite of the heat, the doors of the great structure where the Republican National Convention was being held continued to engulf their thousands. For blocks on both sides of Sixteenth Street, cars and carriages and automobiles were bringing more guests of the convention to add to the crowd that already seemed to fill Wabash Avenue from side to side. A fluctuating mass, the people ebbed and flowed against the front of the Coliseum, animated by but one purpose, to get within its four walls.

In such a concourse the arrival of this and that unit by carriage or automobile was unremarked, and the limousine which contained the party of Mrs. Horace Cumloch paused in its turn before the high-arched entrance, deposited its passengers, and then pursued its difficult way onward through the crowd without attracting particular attention. Of the few spectators

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of this incident whose participation in the feverish spirit of the hour did not keep them from curiously scrutinizing their betters, none appreciated the fact that the tall lady in black and white with the beautiful gray hair, who stepped first from the machine, was the widow of a prominent Chicago millionaire and a well-known figure in the society of earlier days, or their inspection of the new arrivals would have been more curious still. Neither did any realize that the young girl in the linen suit and wide black hat who accompanied her was Miss Harriet Rand, a debutante of several seasons, much travelled, much praised and still unspoiled, and incidentally heiress of the late Willard T. Rand, merchant prince. Yet that the party were "somebodies" was immediately and unanimously conceded, for distinction though unannounced is a quality that in itself commands attention, and these people were distinguished. Besides Mrs. Cumloch and her niece there were Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence Presbey, very well known among the young married people of the city, and George Calvert Benton, notable in that company not so much for the rather large fortune which he possessed as for his persistent and assiduous courtship of Miss Harriet Rand.

"Don't you love the Coliseum?" remarked Mrs. Presbey, whose smart attire and well-kept hair served her in the place of beauty, when they had reached the interior gloom of the big building. "It always reminds me of the horse show or a circus; does n't it you, Harriet?" she added, as they mounted the flight of stairs that

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led to the section where Mr. Presbey and George Benton were already endeavoring to find their seats. But Harriet had no smiling rejoinder to make to this frivolity.

"I should n't think the Republican National Convention would make you think of a *circus*, Cornelia," she said; and the emphasis on the last word as well as the girl's compressed lips and earnest eyes convinced Mrs. Presbey at once that she had said the wrong thing.

"Harriet is so intense!" she whispered to Mrs. Cumloch, as Miss Rand pressed ahead of them in her eagerness to see the great spectacle she knew was awaiting her at the top of the steps.

"She is also sincere," replied Mrs. Cumloch, "and you have n't any idea how interested she is in politics, or how much she knows on the subject. It is really quite extraordinary to hear her —"

A burst of music from the band at the far end of the building interrupted the sentence; and as they reached the top step of their climb, the full view of the convention burst upon them. It had reached Harriet — mounting just ahead of them — first, and held her now speechless and enthralled in the middle of the aisle; lips parted, hands clasped, and dark eyes twice their natural size in their effort to take the majestic measure of that impressive scene. Far and wide, wave on wave, stretched the rows of faces back to the four walls of the great oblong building, where the crowded galleries met them with more faces; and high above them all, the arch of the flag-bedecked dome roofed them in and echoed the throbbing hum of their excitement. The details of the

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picture — the cage full of musicians where it hung in mid-air at the end opposite her; the white placards bearing the section numbers, which dotted the vast area like flecks of foam on an inky sea; and in particular the group of black-coated, black-moustached delegates from the South who stood in the aisle just below her, appealed not at all to Harriet; only the magnitude of the scene, only the wide desert of faces above, below, and around her. Motionless she stood, drinking it all in; and behind her Mrs. Cumloch and Mrs. Presbey, affected quite as much by the girl's feeling as by the sight, stood also motionless.

It was a sight worth looking at, a sight to stir the hearts of true Americans, independent of party considerations. For whatever his politics, that American who looked upon it for the first time must have thrilled at the spectacle of so much organized power, and accorded it the respect which the outer and visible signs of the inner workings of a great Government cannot but inspire.

It was Mrs. Cumloch who at length took pity on the men of the party, who were gesticulating weirdly from a section farther down the aisle, very much as if they were leading a college cheer. "Come, my dear," she said to Harriet; "they're waiting for us," and the girl, her usually clear, colorless skin pink with excitement, followed with unseeing eyes past rows of people and took her seat, still under the spell of her first sight of a convention, and without even observing the programme which the attentive Benton held out to her.

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They had been some few moments settled in their places, and the procession of marching clubs, each booming a different candidate, was weaving its serpentine way among the delegates, accompanied by more or less cheering, according to the degree of popularity of the champion exploited. Miss Rand was enthusiastically clapping the club which bore on its flag the name of the candidate she favored, when she perceived for the first time the person whom she had come to the convention to see, and that was James Vernor Ellis, of New York, delegate from that State and known to newspaperdom as a rising young politician. Ellis was only thirty-one, but he had appeared in the newspapers a number of times during the ten years since his graduation from college, "along with the murderers, divorcees, and other famous people," as he himself was wont to put it. His career in print had been started with a column in a New York society paper chronicling the incidents of a charity bazaar, and the reply which young Mr. Ellis, then just out of college, had made to a fast and fashionable young matron who had offered to dance with him in the dancing pavilion, in exchange for fifty dollars. "Excuse me, Mrs. So-and-So," the young man was reported as saying, "but is n't that a little more than you usually ask a man for putting his arm around your waist?"

The part he played in an incident in connection with the assassination of President McKinley at Buffalo had figured next in the papers. On the evening in question, when the martyred president was lying near to death,

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ence prevented her from having any but the vaguest ideas of possible storm and stress. She was like Kipling's ship before she found herself, open to any interpretation of her character but the right one; and while she enjoyed a gallop upon her favorite horse Phantom more than anything else in the world, she was persuaded that in reality she preferred a lecture or a musical recital. In a word, good red blood and warm sympathies were at a discount in her estimation of the needs of character, and brain and intellect at their highest valuation. As a result, the men she knew found her rather hard to talk to; even those among them who wished to marry her had not altogether understood her, and had fallen in love, if not with her money, then with her rare disposition or her beauty, overlooking almost to a man her undoubted cleverness. It takes a clever man to appreciate a clever woman, and most of the men Harriet had known well were more notably rich or well born than anything else.

And yet her dearest foe could hardly call the girl complex. She was easily enough understood if anyone were to disregard her own valuation of herself and, with a broader, more impersonal judgment, take into account the merits incident to her warm, unselfish, and sympathetic nature. But that was one of the many things George Benton did not know about Harriet. He was not very clever himself, only good and honest and sufficiently successful in his business; and he thought so much of her that he did not know enough to doubt her judgment on any point. So he talked to

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her always about books and pictures and the things he thought she liked to talk about and, not being particularly interested himself, naturally failed to interest her. That was at the beginning of their intimacy; but during the most recent of the many years he had known and cared for her, he had come to take the most pleasure in her society when there was no speech between them, when perhaps she sewed or read and he was permitted to sit beside her smoking, or reading too, as the case might be. To this faithful and too docile lover the joy that is in silence was as familiar as to any cloistered monk, and it was therefore with a look of envy not unmixed with astonishment that he observed the animated conversation in which Ellis and Miss Rand had engaged, sitting together on the swinging bench.

"It's the most amazing thing in the world," he remarked to Mrs. Presbey, "but Harriet actually seems enthusiastic when your brother talks to her!"

Mrs. Presbey laughed as she and Benton left the terrace together; for Mrs. Cumloch had suggested bridge, and her guests were following her in to the card tables. "Almost human!" she returned, "but I'm not at all surprised. That's Verney. He has a humanizing effect on every one; he'd have it on a stone image, I verily believe, if he were left alone with one!"

"Would he?" asked Benton, quite seriously, and casting a parting rueful glance back at Ellis and Harriet, who had excused themselves from cards and were remaining behind.

"Mr. Ellis has n't finished his cigarette, Aunt Lydia,"

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was just entering section 16, was too absorbed in exchanging greetings with various men about him to notice anything so unimportant as the flutter of a woman's programme half way between the New York section and the platform for the speakers.

"What's all the excitement about?" asked George Benton, waking up to the fact that something unusual was going on, and that it—whatever it was—had brought an unwonted color to the cheek of the girl beside him and a wonderful brilliance to her eyes; at the same time he was quite blissfully unaware that there was such a person as James Vernor Ellis in existence, much less that he was known to Miss Harriet Rand.

"It's Mrs. Presbey's brother," replied Harriet, gently and forbearingly, for she had an older sister's affection for Benton, "Mr. Ellis, you know. He's a delegate from New York."

"Ellis?" repeated Benton, adjusting his glasses and looking where Harriet was looking. "He's going to speak, some one told me, in support of the minority report of the Committee on Rules, representing New York State."

"Not really!" cried Harriet, and in the interest of the moment she gave his arm a little shake. George Benton's dark, amiable face broke into a smile.

"Yes, really!" he said; "but what's so extraordinary about that?" He looked admiringly down at her; but Harriet had turned her back and was excitedly telling Ellis's sister, who was not half so excited as she, that Ellis was going to make a speech.

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The momentary animation with which a word from Miss Rand invariably lit up the rather expressionless features of the young man's face vanished almost immediately, and he leaned down and picked up Mrs. Presbey's fan, which had fallen to the floor.

"Thank you, George," returned that lady, and then addressed her husband across him.

"Lawrence," she said, in subdued but intense tones; "I do wish you could hear what this woman in front of me has been saying!"

"Which woman?" asked her husband cheerily; and then as he caught the indignant glances his wife directed at a placid-looking be-spectacled woman in the seat ahead of her, his tone grew graver.

"What's the trouble?" he asked.

"Why, if you'll believe me," returned his wife, "she keeps turning around and talking to me the whole time, telling me just who every one is and what's happening! And I never saw her before in my life!"

"Perhaps she thinks you want her to," soothed Presbey; "she probably means well!"

"Indeed she does n't," retorted Cornelia Presbey; "she's been to fourteen conventions, or so she says"—this with a scathing glance at the lady in front—"and she just wants to show off. I never—"

"My dear," interrupted the lady in front, turning half around in her seat and smiling placidly at Mrs. Presbey, "if you look now I think you can see Alice Roosevelt. Close down by the chairman's table, with a blue and white check—"

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But Mrs. Presbey had turned resolutely toward Mrs. Cumloch on her other side.

"Just as if I only came to the convention to see Alice Roosevelt!" she said indignantly to the older lady.

"Well, I daresay half the people came for that as much as for any other reason," remarked Mrs. Cumloch, tolerantly; "curiosity's the ruling passion with us Americans!"

"And the other half came to shout 'Hats off!' I should say," remarked Mr. Presbey, looking from the men in the seats behind them who were making vociferous requests that all head-gear be removed, to his wife's very becoming but undeniably large hat.

"I'd take it off, dear," he said.

"A shame, Cornelia," commiserated George Benton, who knew the Presbeyes very well, as his companion obeyed; then, looking up, "Hullo!" he said, "whom have we here? Who's taking the platform now?"

"It's Verney!" said Mrs. Presbey, restoring her wonderful light hair to its original smooth outline with one upward sweep of her hand, as a young man in a brown suit appeared on the speaker's platform. "Oh, dear! I don't see what he wants to do this sort of thing for. The family don't care about it at all, his being in politics. It's too conspicuous and degrading."

"And expensive, I should say," said Benton.

"Oh, very!" she replied.

Harriet heard, and stared. "Degrading, Cornelia?" she repeated.

"Yes," replied the young matron. "Fancy one of

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the Ellis family associating with all the horrid men that are mixed up in politics — saloon-keepers and uneducated foreigners and I don't know what all!"

"Hush!" returned the girl peremptorily and as if she thought this remark undeserving of attention, "your brother is going to speak."

The chairman, who had introduced Mr. Ellis, had finished his few remarks and the young man stepped forward, and in a clear, well-sustained voice began his speech.

"We can't hear! Oh, I'm afraid we can't hear!" said Harriet disappointedly; "we're too far back!"

Ellis's speech on representation in the convention was brief and, to judge by the interested faces of the delegates, very much to the point, although, as Harriet had feared, Mrs. Cumloch's party were too far back to hear it all. Sentences and phrases, however, floated back to them at intervals.

"In the District in which I live," they heard him say, "over twenty-two hundred Republican votes were cast at the last election. . . . That District is entitled to two delegates in this convention. . . . In a certain District in Mississippi one hundred and seventy-eight Republican votes were cast in the last election. . . . That District is entitled to two votes in this convention. Can any one describe that as equal representation?" And again, "For weeks we have heard little except the contests between the delegates from these Southern Democratic Districts. They have made so much noise that it almost seemed that the Republican

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party and the whole Government of this country existed for the sole purpose of settling their dispute. Now the contests have been decided, and we shall hear no more of the Republican party in those Districts until the time comes for another national convention." And his clear, well-balanced setting forth of the substance of his subject, accurate in its details and convincingly expressed, brought the young speaker generous applause. Even George Benton, who was not interested in politics and was there because Harriet was there, appreciated that the speaker had distinctly "made good."

"That's a wonder of a speech for so young a man," he said to Presbey, as Ellis with a forcible parting statement, that drew him many a hand, made his bow and, accompanied by two gray-bearded statesmen, one on each side, stepped down from the platform and worked his way back to section 16.

Harriet, watching his progress through the crowd, knew without seeing how his eyes sparkled and how often he bit his lower lip with his teeth — a trick he had in conversation when he had made his point and awaited comment upon it. What followed, the remaining programme of the convention, was to her an anti-climax, even the Roosevelt demonstration; though the epidemic of cheering was catching, and she found herself repeating "Four, four, four years more," with the best of them.

"If only he could hear it, if only the President were here!" she said to George Benton, raising her voice almost to a shout, the din about them was so great.

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"He can," replied Benton; "he is."

"How do you mean?" asked Miss Rand, puzzled.

"Long distance telephone," replied the man. "He's had his ear fast to it from the beginning!" And he pointed out to her the three black discs about five feet in front of the platform, where the speakers stood, which were the receivers of the instruments.

Harriet thrilled. "How proud—how proud he must be!" she said. And because of that listening ear she looked upon the scene of uproar with new interest; at the shrieking people clinging to rafters and standing on chairs, waving hats and programmes in the maddest kind of excitement; at the delegates in the middle, most of them instructed, and some with their votes determined long before their arrival in Chicago, sitting silent and with folded arms; and at one old man in particular, who had taken off his coat and was waving it about his head like a flag; while in her ears sounded the monotonous chant of two men behind her who had not ceased to cry "Down in front!" since the beginning of the demonstration.

"Let's go home," said Mrs. Presbey, when the cheering had lasted nearly half an hour and showed no signs of diminishing. "I'm tired and sick of all this noise, and the heat is dreadful!"

"Where's your enthusiasm, Cornelia, my dear?" asked Mrs. Cumloch, who looked as cool and calm as if it were not 90 degrees in the shade. "Have n't you more patriotism than that?"

"Not in hot weather, Mrs. Cumloch," returned Mrs.

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Presbey; and then to her husband, "Lawrence, you run around to section 16 and tell the Politician — tell Verney — that we're going, and that he's to come out and meet us at the door; I want to see him." Mr. Presbey vanished obediently, and the others, acquiescing in her desire to leave, arose.

"I think," said the woman in front of them, turning around as they did so, "that if you look now you can see Alice —" But she had not time to finish her sentence, for her victim had hurried out into the aisle.

"Did you ever hear anything like that?" enquired Mrs. Presbey breathlessly, as the rest joined her. "Why, she regularly persecuted me!"

"Yes," agreed Harriet, inattentively; "but what did you call your brother then, when you sent Mr. Presbey for him, Cornelia?"

"The Politician.' Why?" returned Mrs. Presbey.

"No reason," replied the girl, who could not have confessed to his sister that she had thought of Ellis by that name ever since she had first seen him.

"We've always called him that, Lawrence and I," went on the young married woman, "ever since he took up politics. More for fun than anything else. It seems so absurd, you know, that Verney should really be a politician! He's so good-looking and altogether aristocratic!"

"It is n't generally considered a compliment to be called one, I suppose," said Mrs. Cumloch.

"Is n't it?" said her niece. "Well, it ought to be."

"Far from being a compliment," remarked Benton,

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at Miss Rand's side as usual; "it's often the reverse. From its association with the comic paper idea of a politician, I imagine; and that would be the most widely accepted one, you see. To my mind the title only calls up a picture of a fat man with a fat cigar in his mouth and fat diamonds on his hands."

"There they are!" exclaimed Mrs. Presbey, and the next second her husband, short, round-faced and perspiring, and her brother, tall and distinguished, had joined them.

"Here's the Politician!" cried Lawrence Presbey jovially. And during the course of the next moment or two, when Mrs. Presbey had ceased to overwhelm her brother with questions and chatter, he and Harriet clasped hands again — after four years.

CHAPTER II

PATRIOTISM AND PEANUTS

IT had been arranged before they parted that Mr. Ellis was to dine that evening at Mrs. Cumloch's house in Lake Forest. The young man had accepted the older lady's invitation with every sign of pleasure, although the smile which went with his few words of thanks had been for her niece; and Mr. and Mrs. Presbey, who were coming too, had agreed to bring him out with them as soon as the convention was over. George Benton, as a matter of course, for he was a great favorite with Mrs. Cumloch, was to accompany her and Harriet back to Lake Forest in their automobile.

The convention was unexpectedly late in closing that afternoon, and the Presbeys arriving a little after seven, accompanied by Ellis, found the rest of the dinner party assembled on the south terrace of the white marble Venetian palace which Mrs. Horace Cumloch chose to call her "summer home," and were cordially greeted by their hostess. The young man from New York — the others happened to be all Chicagoans — bowed to nearly a dozen people as he was introduced. He wore the same brown suit that Harriet had seen him in that afternoon, as the lateness of the convention had

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not given him time to change. Every other man in the party was in evening dress, but he did not explain the matter, feeling that apology for something he could not help was unnecessary. Superfluous explanation was never his habit in any event.

"You know we have a politician among us to-night," remarked Mrs. Cumloch, as they sat down to the table, "a real, live politician," and she smiled kindly at Ellis. Whereupon the conversation centred at once, firmly and politely, in spite of the young delegate's modest efforts to stave it off, upon the convention, the scene of enthusiasm that afternoon, and the results of the day's session, not to mention the small part which the stranger among them, the guest from out of town, had played. Started in a spirit of politeness merely, it seemed to grow and flourish until it had shed its shell of perfunctory interest and become an animated, living thing under the magnetic touch, the flashing eye, and the earnest accents of the "Politician."

"It's like watching a finely bred race-horse quivering for the start to watch that fellow talk on his favorite subject," remarked a middle-aged lawyer, Lee Stanton, who was one of those present, to the man who sat nearest him. "Never saw such whole-souled enthusiasm in my life!"

"And about politics, too," commented his wife from across the way, with surprise that was almost scornful — "such a dry, uninteresting subject!"

That was it exactly. Mrs. Stanton had unconsciously voiced the opinion of every one there in her

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remark. Either through natural indifference or indolence or because of the general tendency of people not directly connected with public affairs to condemn political conditions as too bad to improve, and on that account not worth talking about, the subject had heretofore been dry and uninteresting to Mrs. Cumloch's guests. And that was what made Verney's enthusiasm so amazing to them. It was so inspiring, so sincere, so convincing, that from a feeling almost of self-obligation they responded in kind, felt their eyes kindle when his did, were enthusiastic too.

Ellis was a new type to these wealthy, contented people, whose lines lay in pleasant places far removed from the responsibilities of public life and the harassing questions pertaining to the government of the country. He was not, however, in any sense an extraordinary young man, only a thoroughly practical dyed-in-the-wool Republican-organization politician, whose god was the Republican party and whose religion was "regularity." But he was at the same time a man of principle and integrity, which qualities identified him with the honest minority among politicians instead of the corrupt majority. He even went so far as to cherish ambitions and schemes for obtaining civil service reform, although his field of activity was not extensive and he had as yet only been connected with State and city politics. These he expected to realize not as the New School reformers wished to do, by means of abolishing political organization, but by reforming it.

It was this fact, apart from his personal magnetism,

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which explained the flattering attention with which his auditors regarded him and the impression which he seemed to have made upon them. The anomaly of a machine politician with ideals, who worked for reform and patriotism, was too novel in their experience not to be entertaining. Then, too, that very class-feeling which made Mrs. Presbey term politics degrading and which accounted for the tone of scorn with which Mrs. Stanton had described the subject as "dry and uninteresting," compelled them to respect this man who was one of them, and who yet was not too proud to take off his gloves and do the work they all knew must be done, no matter how they despised it. No wonder they drew closer round the table and hung on his words, with much the same wondering and curious interest as dancers in a ballroom during some great war might display upon the entrance of a soldier with news from the front.

Harriet looked about her with a peculiar sense of pride that she somehow felt she had a right to, as she noted their absorbed faces and realized that Verney was the centre of attention. How interested they all seemed, these ten or eleven people that she had known all her life — the Stantons, friends of her aunt's; young Francis Morton, who had been her devoted friend and comrade since the earliest of their common twenty-four years; Pauline Wright, the one girl whose friendship among girls meant the most; George Benton, the Presbeyes, her aunt's brother, Mr. Case, and the two other men who made the party complete.

"What we need most," he was saying to Mr. Case,

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she said, kissing her aunt tenderly, if preoccupiedly, on the forehead.

"Good-night, dearest," said that lady, who had been a widow a long time and had no children of her own, so that this one niece was very dear; "sleep well!" And her eyes followed the young girl's figure.

At the door Harriet turned. "I think it might be nice to go to New York for our shopping trip, earlier than you had planned," she said with an abruptness sometimes characteristic of her. "New York is very attractive in summer, I think."

Miss Rand saw Ellis once more before he left the city. It was at a Saturday afternoon gathering at a certain popular club by the lake, not much outside the city limits, to which belonged a number of people who knew each other well. Harriet was pouring tea — a task that bored her — with an admirable counterfeit graciousness, and a number of men were keeping the young heiress very busy. Ellis, on the other hand, was playing tag out on the lawn with a small girl very much spoiled and very pretty — they had to be pretty, even in the infant stage, to please Verney — who belonged to the Lee Stantons. And this in spite of the fact that there were eighteen or twenty more or less just blossomed debutantes, with droopy hats and every variety of fetching costume, observing him out of the corners of their eyes from the porch, while they waited for him to speak to them. They did not look at all pleased with his method of entertaining himself.

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Harriet was probably the only girl there who was pleased, and she thought Ellis's absorption in the little girl to the exclusion of the big girls, delightfully boyish and, she imagined, characteristic. And she was right. Verney, whose restless spirit was veritable quicksilver, fagged and worn a little as he was with the strain of the convention and his duties there, found more relaxation in his game on the lawn with the child than in forcing himself through the first steps in the process of becoming acquainted with a number of people he probably would never see again. And Harriet, he saw, was very much engaged. So tea went merrily on without him, amid talk and laughter and gentle tinkling of spoon against cup, with the June sun shining gayly down on the picturesque little club-house, the crowd of people on the porch, and the big lake shimmering and sparkling not a stone's throw away.

"Who is that very good-looking young man playing with the Stanton child on the lawn?" asked a woman near Harriet.

"I really don't know," another woman replied, at first indifferently, and then with interest as she turned her eyes toward the lawn at the farthest confines of which Verney, hatless and with tie flying, was playing horse and driver with a small girl in a white dress, using her bright blue sash for reins. "I wonder who he is," she said; and the other replied, "He came with the Presbeys, I think, and some one said he was a New Yorker. But that's all I know about him." And

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that was all the stir the Politician made at the Racquet and Rudder Club.

But in spite of young Miss Stanton's attempts to keep him to herself all the afternoon, he found time eventually to speak to Miss Rand. George Benton had just departed in search of tealess ones with the cup of Oolong Harriet had last poured, when Verney, opportune and fortunate as he usually was, appeared at the porch railing near which she sat.

"Won't you come down and play horse?" he said; "it's great, is n't it, Elizabeth?" looking down, as he spoke, at the little girl whose hand he clasped, both of them warm and panting from their exercise.

"Great!" she mimicked merrily; "let's play some more!"

"See," he said; "she likes it!"

"Oh, yes," smiled Harriet, "but she's a little girl!"

"And you're a big one; what's the difference?"

"Every difference in the world," she declared.

"Well, maybe; but never mind, come on and play!"

"It's a little undignified," she said, getting up, "but perhaps I will."

"You'd better," he advised; "we have some peanuts, and we'll give you some if you're good."

"Peanuts," she laughed. "Oh, that settles it then. Why did n't you tell me before?" and she joined them on the lawn, casting a hasty deprecating glance at the tea table she was deserting.

"Fine business," said Verney; "and now let's play

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horse. Elizabeth would rather be the driver, so you and I will have to be her fiery steeds."

"I want to be a fiery steed!" said Elizabeth, the spoiled one, promptly, shaking her curls at her friend.

"Of course," said he; "naturally you would, being a woman."

"But where are the peanuts?" interrupted Harriet. "You have n't given me any yet."

"Peanuts?" he repeated; "who said anything about peanuts?"

"Why, you did! You said you'd give me some if I came down," cried the girl.

"Oh, *those* peanuts!" he replied. "My dear friend, did n't you know I only said that to get you down?"

"The idea!" she said. "And you really have n't any?"

"Not one," he returned cheerfully; "you see, I was afraid you would n't come for me, and I knew peanuts would get you."

"I am fond of them; how did you know?" she laughed.

"Oh, I know everything — real curly hair when I see it, and when people don't like me, and how to put two and three together."

"Silly," she said; "but I do think you were mean about the peanuts!"

"There you see, Elizabeth," he said to the little girl trotting happily by his side — the three had strolled some distance away from the club-house — "she thinks you're mean. You should n't have deceived her!"

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And the child, appreciating to the utmost the fun of this sudden transfer of responsibility to her shoulders, laughed delightedly.

They had begun with peanuts, Verney and Harriet, but they ended with Francis Bacon.

"You'd like to read them. The whole of the philosophy of life, to my thinking, is contained in his essays," he told her as they stood on the steps of the club with Mrs. Presbey, waiting for Lawrence Presbey to bring his motor-car around. The convention was over, and it was his last day in Chicago, the last time Harriet would see him for Fate alone knew how long, since he left for New York that evening with the other delegates from that State.

"I'd like to send you a copy of it—if I may. Good-bye," he said; and with a last firm clasp of the hand he was gone, swallowed up by the Presbey's automobile and whirled away before the girl's very eyes.

"Verney is certainly a great fellow," Lawrence Presbey remarked to his wife that evening, reaching his apartment on the Drive just in time for dinner, after seeing his brother-in-law off on the delegates' special train. "And 'pig-headed' is n't the word for his kind of obstinacy."

"Particulars, please," responded his wife; "you always assume that I know what you're talking about, Lawrie, and half the time I don't."

"Well, you know that little Stanton girl he was playing with at the 'Racquet and Rudder' this afternoon?" explained her husband obligingly.

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"Yes," she said.

"Well, it seems Verney told the kid all about the convention and promised to get her one of the flags they'd used in decorating, as a memento."

"Just like him!" said Verney's sister with a sort of irritation; "he'd rather be doing something for other people than not, no matter how absurd or impossible it is."

"That's just it — it was absurd. It was all very well to promise, but as it turned out, we stayed so late at the club we did n't have time to go 'way up to the Coliseum before the train left."

"And he did n't get it?" asked Mrs. Presbey. "Too bad to disappoint the child!"

"Not at all," said her husband; "how quick you are to jump at conclusions, Cornelia. If you think a little thing like losing his train would keep him from getting that flag, you're mistaken. What do you suppose he did?"

"Oh, almost anything, from chartering an airship to get him there in time to conjuring a flag out of the sidewalk!"

"No, he insisted upon driving over to State Street and buying a flag at one of the big dry-goods stores. He said all American flags looked alike, and little Elizabeth would n't know whether it came from the Coliseum or not — all she cared about was having the flag."

"And did you go?" asked Mrs. Presbey.

"You bet we did! I argued with him in vain, told him he'd miss his train sure, but he swore he'd rather

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do it than disappoint the child, embellishing the assertion with some of his choicest profanity — you know Verney's rather good at that — and we started off."

"He has a fine vocabulary," interrupted Mrs. Presbey. "I think he got the habit at college, and really, though I deprecate it, he's such a past master, I rather like to hear him. You can't help admiring perfection, you know, when you meet it."

"You ought to have been with me, then. My country! but we had a time. The machine was as slow as molasses getting through the crowd, and I held a stop watch on the obstinate beggar while he was in the store, with my heart in my mouth, I assure you! By George, I don't see how he possibly made it!"

"I could have told you he would," replied Mrs. Presbey. "Verney's come pretty close to it millions of times, but I don't think he ever actually missed a train in his life."

And with this unconscious commentary on a trait of her brother's character which perhaps formed its keynote,—his faculty for taking every kind of chance without any serious consequences,—the Presbeyes went in to dinner.

CHAPTER III

"FOR THE HUNDREDTH TIME"

“**F**OR the hundredth time, Harriet, won't you marry me? ”

The speaker was George Benton, walking beside Miss Rand on the smooth lawn of the country club at Lake Forest — very correct in his becoming riding attire and very earnest in tone.

The two had been riding an hour or more, and had stopped at the club for tea. It was Saturday afternoon, and the place was at its gayest. The polo down in the lower meadows was over, and players and spectators alike, the former conspicuous in their light-blue coats and white breeches, were engaged in the grateful occupation of assuaging a just thirst. The piazzas were thronged, and straggling lines of men and women were still trailing across the golf course toward the club-house. Out on the open stone terrace in front of the veranda at numerous small tables sat young girls in tennis costume, hair bound with ribbons pink, blue, and white, ostensibly to keep troublesome locks out of the way, but in reality for effect, talking and laughing with gilded college youths. Back under the shelter of the veranda roof, whose shade was kinder to their

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years than the August sun, older women, mothers and aunts of these girls, were established in comfortable wicker chairs with teacups at their elbows, making the most of their own society, their contemporaries of the other sex having sought the seclusion of the club buffet, while here, there, and everywhere, sitting on veranda railings, hanging on the backs of chairs, in quiet corners in the club sitting-rooms, the young married women prevailed, flirting indefatigably with each other's husbands or with the coterie of young bachelors without which no married set considers itself complete. And every one, maids and matrons, with the auxiliary force of men in attendance, was sipping something.

Harriet and Benton having had their tea, iced and served in a remote corner of the piazza, and with an unfinished argument on their hands which had been raging intermittently from the moment they had started on their ride until the moment when the groom at the club had taken their horses, were walking over the lawn talking earnestly, in the direction of the tennis courts, where a fast set of men's singles was being played. Not that they had any special interest in either of the champions of the racquet whom they could see beyond the wire backstop rushing frantically about the grass court in their white clothes, like fish in a tank, shouting “deuce” and “love-forty” at each other. The fact was they were so interested in what they had to say, that they did n't care at all where they went.

Harriet was trying her best to explain to George

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“corruption” and the “evils of politics.” “Organization,” like the “Onward and Upward” of the Salvation Army, was the watchword of his political faith, and without organization he believed that nothing could be done.

Yet, though he had ideals as well as these avowed reformers, or “extremists” as he called them, he did not any the less hesitate to “play the game as it was played,” though perhaps the extremists would in many instances have considered his methods unworthy. But that was just the difference between their kind of reform and Ellis’s. They were idealists, and he was a man with ideals, which admitted of his being other things besides — a believer in common sense, for one thing. He was keen enough and man enough to realize in playing his cards that the elements he had most to deal with were self-interest and human weakness, and that in order to get men to do what he wanted them to do, he must play upon their selfish motives and interests. And he very often did.

An incident illustrating this practical side of Verney’s politics happened one evening in connection with one of the thirty captains of the Election Districts within his Assembly District. When Verney, as leader of the District, first asked those thirty men to take up the work as captains, he did not ask them to do it on moral or altruistic grounds. He did tell them, to be sure, that he believed they would be performing a duty and that they would find the work interesting; but he urged them particularly to do it because, he said, if they worked well

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enough and long enough, they might expect to have come to them increase of salary, promotion, appointments, additional business, or some material gain directly or indirectly. On the night in question, a captain walked in where Verney was sitting at his headquarters, and presented to him his resignation. The Politician immediately asked the captain whether he was in any way dissatisfied with his, Verney's management, or what other reason he had for resigning. While the young fellow was answering, Verney recollected that the captain's brother, who held a government position, had failed to secure a promotion which he had desired and that the captain himself some time before had been disappointed in not receiving some business from a semi-political source, which he had expected. Recognizing at once by this token the kind of material he was dealing with, and determined not to lose the man's services, which had been valuable to the young leader, Ellis did not waste any time in urging the captain to remain in his position for the reason that it was his duty, or on philanthropic grounds. He continued sharpening his pencil, a process interrupted for a moment by the captain's entrance, and fixing the malcontent with a steady blue gaze, remarked with careful casualness:

"I wonder if you've considered the fact that if some plans which are being formed are successful, there will be next year in the Executive Chamber a Governor whose attitude toward the active members of the organization will be different from that of the present Governor? You have worked long and hard as captain; I would n't

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give up now if I were you, but hang on a while longer; go through this next campaign and see what happens."

He ended his remarks with one of the true Verney smiles, which at the instant of their inception made all men his. Whereupon the captain, smiling too, thoughtfully tore up his resignation; and Verney said, "Come on out and have a drink."

And that was all there was to that.

But the characteristic that most fitted Ellis to be what he was, a politician of rapidly growing importance, was simply his stupendous capacity for hard work. When, after two years of ceaseless activity as captain of his little District, he was made successively a member of the New York County Committee, a member of the Legislature, and finally leader of his Assembly District, he became known throughout New York City and influential in his party throughout the State. That same remarkable energy and thoroughness, and that infinite capacity for taking pains which had characterized his conduct as captain of his little District, characterized his administration of the succeeding offices he filled. As this spirit inspired him then to become personally acquainted with each one of the five or six hundred voters the little District contained, so that he might feel assured he knew exactly what each one of them would do and how he was going to vote (which invariably resulted in his turning out the largest registration and the largest vote in proportion to the size of his District at election times), it inspired him later at Albany, when he was made assemblyman, in his work of getting bills he ap-

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proved of passed. He worked on them to the limit of his strength, considering nothing too much trouble to do that would help in any way, and forced himself to talk on the floor, although by a contradiction in his character and in spite of his undoubted ability in speaking, he was shy about being the centre of attention. He had won recognition from the chair and from other assemblymen, time and again, where few men much older than he had been able to do so.

It was this aptitude for hard work too, combined with his great personal charm, tact, and brains, which with each year of office increased the scope of his activities; and having signalized his first year in the House by the introduction of an unusual number of important bills, he grew with the succeeding years to be regarded as one of its strong men, and was always appointed to the important committees; and in his fourth and last year, although the youngest member, he became not only one of the big men of the Assembly, but one of the first four or five in it. He had been, in short, as a result of the hardest and most conscientious kind of work, successful so far as he had gone.

Now, even the strongest man, and Ellis was strong, cannot use his strength to capacity limits day in and day out without feeling it a little; and the hardest thing the young man had to bear in this busy, complicated, successful life of his was the reckoning day that faced him at intervals, when a mild form of nervous breakdown compelled him to doff his armor for a while and give himself up to the heart-wearying inaction which

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the doctor decreed as the only way to get well again. Loss of sleep, necessitated by his efforts to pay attention to his law business and his political interests too, was the chief cause of his disorder, augmented not a little by the number of cigars he smoked and the amount of alcoholic stimulant he found it necessary to take as a substitute for sleep.

In commenting upon this state of affairs, his uncle Richmond, who was a bachelor of forty-eight, and who thought the sun, moon, and stars revolved about his nephew Verney, had often asked him why he worked so hard and followed everything out to such minute detail, vouchsafing it as his opinion that every one else loafed more or less, and that it was foolish for Verney not to do the same, and Ellis had replied: "Because if I have anything to accomplish I will not take any chances with it. To gain my end I must try every possible expedient, and I must attend to every detail I can think of, however unimportant it may seem, and experience has proved to me that the policy never fails to pay."

Verney had been in New York just a week when he received a letter from Chicago addressed in a feminine hand which he had never seen before but knew at once. Of course it was Miss Rand writing to thank him for the promised copy of "Bacon's Essays," which he had sent her immediately upon his return to his own city. It was only proper that she should do so; yet he opened the envelope which a club servant handed him — he was lunching that day at the Princeton Club — with a feeling almost impatient that his little courtesy should have

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put her to the trouble of a formal acknowledgment. He would almost have expected Harriet Rand to regard her thanks as a thing understood and to accept the inconsiderable gift in silence. But when he had read the letter he was glad that she had allowed the conventions to rule her after all. It was an interesting letter, chiefly on the subject of the reading she had done recently; and her opinion of the essays was a thing of joy to Verney. Almost every other girl he knew would have raved about each separate one as a matter of duty, with little discrimination; but Miss Rand had dared to be critical, even though she knew the high regard in which he held them himself, and had frankly admitted that she found them difficult to understand. She wrote:

"I must confess that although I very much like your friend Francis Bacon and am deeply in your debt for introducing him to me, I found him at times a little difficult to grasp; that is, at once. This one emanation of his intellect, written, as he says in the preface, 'in his leisure moments,' has commanded the whole of mine in appreciating it. But I do not lay this up against him, for I always enjoy most the nut that's hardest to crack. Does that sound like the epigrammatical gentleman himself? Or do I flatter myself? But my mind is a veritable sponge for absorbing the style of the different authors I read. If it happens to be Ibsen, my conversation is terse and bloodless for days; if the dear Jane Austen, I find myself garrulous beyond belief! Wouldn't you hate to meet me just after a dose of Henry James? But to return to His Lordship. I like the essay entitled 'Of Truth' and the one on 'Great Place' and the ones on 'Ambition' and 'Honor and Reputation'; but the one I particularly dote upon is 'Friendship.' That I abhor and detest and indignantly refute the ones on 'Love' and on 'Marriage' goes without saying. You could hardly expect me to attach the seal of my approval to such abominable cynicisms — now, could

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you? What a cross wife he must have had, to inspire such misogynic utterances! And how terribly selfish of her to indulge her bad temper! If she had had a true sense of her responsibilities he would never have been able to visit his displeasure over her shortcomings upon the innocent heads of all womankind!"

Verney smiled as he read that, and turning over the page, saw with pleasure that the letter was a long one. After further comment on the book and on other reading she had done, she took up another matter, her receipt of a picture from him — his photograph. This gift had followed "Bacon's Essays" very shortly as a result of a little passage at arms which occurred the evening he had dined at Mrs. Cumloch's, when that lady had shown her friends, in a spirit of amusement, a picture of Harriet which had appeared in the "society column" of a newspaper. Verney had appropriated it at once, as much perhaps to tease the girl as for anything else, and though much importuned by Harriet, had refused to restore it. To justify which rather doubtful conduct he had sent her his in fair exchange. Verney grinned appreciatively though a trifle sheepishly at Miss Rand's comment upon his arbitrary and novel method of making restitution. She went on to say:

"Thanks vastly for the picture; it's a counterfeit presentment of you, of course; but counterfeit or not, I shall cherish it, though it is not at all a proper equivalent for the picture you purloined. You know very well that a handsome photograph is not a fair exchange for a newspaper picture. But how exactly like you just to send it without a word! So very modest and casual-like! As if you were an agent trying to introduce a new brand of pickles! No advertising matter or testimonials with

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our samples! They speak for themselves! You would n't have told me it was coming for worlds, would you?"

Verney had to laugh at this. What acumen, what penetration the girl showed, anyway! How accurately she had divined his reason for making as little as possible of the matter, his fear that he might be accused of vanity! But how else should he have done it, for Heaven's sake? he wondered. Did she think he'd send it to her in a gilt frame with "yours ever" on it, like any schoolboy? He rather thought not; a grown man did things like that without shouting about it. And yet for all that, the Verney who had stolen the picture of Harriet in the first place was not so much like a grown man as he fancied he was, but much more like the schoolboy he had repudiated! There was a boyishness about Vernor Ellis that many years and much sorrow would have a hard time to conquer.

In summing up her thanks for both gifts, Harriet said:

"I think, on the whole, that of the two books you sent me—the one bound in Russia calf and the one without any binding, Bacon's Essays and the picture of yourself,—I prefer the book that is not yet finished, the leaves of which are still uncut, its story still to write, and the title of which is 'James Vernor Ellis, Politician.' Am I not right? Isn't politics the noblest career open to man, and isn't the man who is succeeding in that career most to be envied? But I see that I am thrusting you upon a pedestal without even so much as a by-your-leave! Do you like it? Or do pedestals bore you?"

Having reached which satisfactory confession—the very frankness of which prevented Verney from misin-

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terpreting it in any way, frankness being the essence of friendship,—she closed with a remark to the effect that she and her aunt thought of going on to New York for a while before the summer was over to do some shopping and see some people they knew; and in ending she was his “very sincere friend.”

Verney liked the letter, he liked it a great deal, in fact he hardly remembered ever having received a letter from a girl that pleased him more; and inspired by this conviction he betook himself at once to a writing-room and dashed off a note in reply. He said:

“My very kind friend, you would spoil me by what you say to me if I did not know you laughed a little in that kind way of yours as you said it, and I should ask you not to put me on a pedestal if I did not know that you had no intention of putting me there. There *are* heroes in politics, for in that arena those who love the bright face of danger have as big a chance and take as many risks as sailor or soldier. But I’m not one of them; I’m only a worker. Yet I say ‘only’ with pride, for ‘I love the dust the heroes raise in striving,’ and of course there’s always the possibility that I may strive hard enough to raise some myself some day. But I don’t think I’d like to be on a pedestal even if I could. It might be awfully lonely, I think, up so high—unless of course I could persuade somebody awfully nice to come up there with me! It’s bully that you’re coming to New York for a while! Hurry up and come! Bacon is a good fellow, isn’t he? I was as sure when I sent him to you that you and he would compare notes favorably on this and that, as that you would disagree vitally on the subjects you mention. Naturally you could n’t swallow his ‘love and marriage’; you wouldn’t be as human and likeable as you are if you could. Do you mind my saying that your letter as a commentary on what you have read is a wonder?”

“Faithfully,

“JAMES VERNOR ELLIS.”

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Which, as a letter to a young and attractive member of the other sex, was about as discreet as Verney ever was. He never chose his words or stayed the warmth of impulse for any fear that more significance would be attached to them than he intended. He complimented womankind, whether unduly or not they alone could tell — for Verney was never enlightened on the subject if they could help it,— by assuming that they were able to keep as heart-whole as he, and by feeling free to express his admiration or interest or friendship, just as you like to call it, without danger of misinterpretation. In a singularly ingenuous and joyous way he took it for granted that their intelligence was equal to the task of discerning at once that his interest in each particular case was the interest of a man who believed that the more charming women a man knew the better off he was, and who made no secret of the fact that he was fortunate enough to know a great many. But in the question whether he over-complimented them or not lay the possible weak spot in this otherwise admirable attitude, an attitude in which he should really have been quite justified, if its success had not been dependent upon that most variable and uncertain of qualities, a woman's ability to remain impersonal at will.

But while it was to some extent due to his under-rating the susceptibility of woman and his own powers of pleasing, one other factor that figured largely in Verney's sense of freedom from responsibility in this regard and had kept him up to the present time unscathed by the fires of love, was his resolve taken some

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seven years previously to abandon all thoughts of marriage. This he had done in order that he might pursue his work in politics with singleness of purpose, and he believed that course necessary for many reasons. Considering the question of marriage for a man engaged in politics from the practical point of view of whether or not it was to the man's advantage to marry, Verney was of the opinion that it was not.

Setting aside the risk a man ran in getting a wife who would not or could not help, who was perhaps too selfish to interest herself in her husband's work or too much of an invalid to be able to do so, he thought the assistance a woman might give in the way of social entertaining, or financially, if she were rich, was more than counterbalanced by the obligation any right-minded man would be under to spend as much of his time as he could at home; for in Verney's estimation a man engaged in politics has no time to spend at home! Then, again, he thought that the social side of a political career did not count for as much as it was supposed to count, that it was not, in short, a necessity. While it might figure largely in the case of a man who had reached the top of the political ladder, the young politician thought it figured only microscopically in the case of a man like himself, who was just beginning his career. The political game he felt, anyway, was difficult and uncertain enough without mixing up with the social game, and he believed that oftentimes politics was as much the means of advancing a woman in society as society was the means of advancing a man in politics.

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Then, too, in his own case, if his wife were not rich and the whole burden of supplying her wants would rest upon his shoulders, he did not feel equal to the task; not, that is, if he were to spend part of his time in politics, where he knew he would have to spend money rather than make it. Girls wanted so much nowadays, it took all a man's time in his opinion to support them in luxury, except of course the happy mortal who was born rich — and Verney was not the kind of man to want to support his wife in any other way! It was to him as if he said: "To marry, caring as I do for politics, would be like committing bigamy. It would be as wrong, for if I did not abandon either interest I could give only half a heart to each."

It was that very ambition to be just and fair that convinced the young man that marriage was not for him, since he could accomplish that end only by giving up his beloved work; for the idea of asking a woman to sacrifice her rights to her husband's duty and society that he might gratify his ambitions appeared to him as beyond the realm of things possible. So that his resolution to remain single was to his mind more a matter of necessity than choice. His friend Ordway's experience had made it clear to him, too, that the fact that a man had money did not alter the case, did not, in other words, affect the problem of his neglecting his wife if he remained in politics. The young man was married, he was in politics, and he was wealthy; yet though his means prevented his wife, a very beautiful and intelligent girl, from actually coming to want, she was nevertheless

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neglected, for she was left almost constantly to herself owing to the demands made upon her husband's time by his public life.

This was true to such an extent, indeed, that it had resulted in driving her to the practice of going about to the theatre and to dinners and dances with other men. They were, to be sure, usually young men whom she had known before her marriage, and she was able to explain the thing sufficiently to her friends by laughing remarks to the effect that her husband "was so busy, so devoted to politics," that she hardly "saw anything of him"; but it was for all that a dangerous practice and a state of affairs that was not at all fair or just to her. The fact that she did not realize the pathos of her position, her loss of what was hers by right, her husband's time and society, but comforted herself by rejoicing in his prominence and success and in priding herself upon knowing as much about politics as he, holding up English wives as a model in this respect for their American sisters to copy, did not make it any the less true that she was a neglected wife. And Verney realized this, had plenty of opportunity to realize it, knowing the Ordways as well as he did. It was, indeed, before him as an example almost every day of his life, for he saw a great deal of his friend, and engaged as they often were in the same work, was in a position to know just how little time he was able to spend at home. And then — and this was the best proof of all — he had himself helped Agnes Ordway to pass some of those dull evenings when Oliver was away.

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If this state of things could exist, if his absorption in politics made it impossible for a man to give a proper amount of his time to his wife when the man in question was relieved of the necessity of providing for her, how much more likely was it to exist in the case of a man who was not relieved of that necessity, who had to stock a larder and pay the month's rent? It was not only likely that it should exist, but it was inevitable, and Verney's second older brother, Benjamin, illustrated the fact admirably. He was headmaster of a leading boys' school in Connecticut, with a small salary and five children; and when Verney visited him, the engrossing nature of domestic responsibility never failed to come home to Verney with its full force. There were so many, many things that Benjamin had to do! He had so little time to himself! Why, as long as Verney could remember, his brother had been trying to finish a text-book he had begun to compile the year of his marriage — ten years ago,— and had not finished yet! For such a man to have thought of entering politics, unless he deserted wife and children, was absurd. And this proof of the incompatibility of domestic life with a career of the kind, even more than that which the experience of his friend Ordway supplied, was an object lesson to Verney; for Verney, like his brother, was not a rich man.

With such strong evidence before him that human responsibility is a curb to ambition, was it strange that Ellis at so early an age had waved a gay farewell to Matrimony beckoning down the road? And was it

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strange that a feeling of freedom from the obligation to hold himself to account for word and deed which is usually felt toward women by a man of principle should have resulted from that act? Not that he thought any the less of the blessings of matrimony or decried it in its proper place, but he could not help seeing its impracticability in politics, where a man must give all his time, every breathing moment that he is awake, to his work; and though he did not quite agree with the maxim that "a young man married is a young man marred," he had come to regard the blissful state with such disfavor where a politician is concerned, that whenever any of the young captains in his district took unto himself a wife, their leader was wont to shake his head gloomily and regard that man as lost, so far as getting more work out of him went.

If Harriet Rand was to be one of those instances, which doubtless had occurred in Verney's experience, when his confidence in the perspicacity of women had been at fault, what a pity it was that some clear-sighted arbiter who knew the rules of the game could not have explained to her that afternoon two days later in Lake Forest, as she broke the seal of the letter with "Princeton Club" on it in orange lettering, just how things stood with the young man and of his happy ignorance of his responsibility in such matters, while it was yet time! Or what a pity it was that she had missed the significance of Verney's gift to her of "Bacon's Essays," that she should have failed to recognize the unconscious warning contained in the young politician's admiration of

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the great philosopher whose writings all teach his belief in the age-old argument that matrimony is an enemy to art, as applied to every kind of public life!

But nobody did explain, and the warning embodied in Verney's gift had passed by her unread, so that there was no disturbing element to interfere with her enjoyment of his letter. She read it through once slowly, and then again, standing where the maid who had brought it to her found her in the middle of her aunt's Italian garden, where she had been amusing herself trimming a boxwood hedge under the direction of the gardener. Shears in hand, garden hat fallen to her shoulders and held only by its strings, she walked toward the house — boxwood hedge and waiting gardener forgotten — to seek in her room a pigeon-hole in a rosewood desk which might be immediately consecrated to the guardianship of the missive in her hand and of any others like it that might come her way. . . . What a wonderful thing it was to know a man in public life, to be friends with a politician!

CHAPTER V

“HERE WE ARE, CORA!”

THAT part of June which was left after the convention and the month following were hard weeks for Verney. His primary fights at former elections had been noted for their bitterness, but nothing he had done in the past could equal the energy and singleness of purpose with which he worked now to convert the feeling of dissatisfaction with Downes's administration, already beginning to gain ground in New York city, into a feeling in favor of his friend Ordway, for Republican nominee for Governor. His law business suffered sadly these days, but little by little, inch by inch, by means known only to the expert politician, he had succeeded in establishing to a certain degree the young speaker's name in men's mouths, had at last been able to start the current of party sentiment toward him. It was slow work, though, and he had achieved little more than that by the end of July, when an interesting political situation was precipitated by Governor Downes's announcement that he would accept a renomination at the hands of the Republican party if it were offered to him.

Whereupon the sluggishness, the indecision, the uncertainty which had been characterizing the Republican

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party vanished like smoke, before the thrown gauntlet of this news, and divided itself upon the instant into two factions,—the men who were for Downes and the men who were against him. Of these factions one was composed chiefly of the main body of voters, the men who take no part in political affairs except to vote; and the other chiefly of the politicians or members of the organization, the men who are active in politics, who are responsible for the conduct of elections and the political machinery.

It was with the latter, of course, that Verney, as an organization man and because of his personal prejudice against the Governor, identified himself. The reasons that caused him and his fellow-politicians to disagree with the Downes supporters were based on many grounds. It seemed to them that those who belonged to that faction “leaned so far over backward,” as the expression went, in their desire to keep public office free from evil political influences that they had come to think that discrimination in making appointments should be made against every political recommendation and every man who had been active in party affairs, irrespective of his ability. They believed also that those men followed blindly the sensational newspaper clamor and the popular wave of anti-corporation feeling in which every corporation was a trust and every trust was bad, and applauded every detail of Governor Downes’s limitations upon insurance companies and his regulation of the railroads, however drastic they might be.

The politicians believed, on the other hand, that party

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service and political recommendation were entitled to consideration. They realized the necessity under changed economic conditions of governmental regulation where competition no longer existed, and of governmental regulation of public utility corporations, but they believed that supervision might be overdone if, for instance, as had recently happened, through its means a great railroad could be sent to the wall and millions of people inconvenienced by the curtailment of its services. They believed, in short, that the State was riding too fast over untried roads; that it had gone far enough in radical experiment; that slower and more cautious ways should be taken; and that it was wiser to wait before giving further power to commissions which had not yet accomplished in a year, or made any progress toward accomplishing, the reforms they had set out to effect. They feared also the results of the unrestricted power which this placed in the hands of one man, whose right it was to make the appointments to these commissions.

Of all these reasons for opposing Downes's renomination, however, the one that appeared most important in their eyes was the Governor's hostile attitude toward the organization itself. To judge by that system of his, so approved by his partisans, of making appointments which discriminated against party workers and men active in politics, and his violent advocacy of the direct system of selecting candidates for nomination which every politician considered inimical to the Republican organization, he seemed to believe that in the destruction of organization lay the only hope of obtaining civil

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service reform. To Verney, who believed — whether the majority of the politicians cherished similar ideals or not — that the way to effect reform was by means of reforming the party, not by destroying its organization, since in his estimation a party government was essential to the welfare of the country, this attitude of Downes was alone reason enough for fighting against his re-nomination.

From the moment Downes's willingness to run again for Governor became known, Verney's desire that Oliver Ordway, who was a member of the organization and an enthusiastic party worker, should have the nomination, increased tenfold. The news had also the effect of rendering his self-appointed task of spreading his friend's cause much easier, and he found less difficulty in winning men over to his way of thinking with every twenty-four hours that passed after it had come out in the papers.

About the middle of August, however, the "Autocrat of Oyster Bay," as the President had been termed at that time by one of his critics, put a heavy spoke in Ellis's wheel by sending forth the dictum after consultation with Republican party leaders at Sagamore Hill, that Downes must be the party's nominee for Governor. No matter how much the organization men might resent this arbitrary interference on the part of the President, they could not help realizing that it would have its influence on the voters of the State at large, who, they said, believed blindly in the theory that the King could do no wrong, and blew hot or cold as the case might be, at the mere lifting of the royal eyebrow.

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These were busy times for them, the organization leaders; for while they had only to unite their forces behind one man in order to defeat Mr. Downes, the character of that man was of the utmost importance if they were to satisfy not only their own ideas of the requirements of a candidate for such high office, but to placate as well public opinion and the President's. They were as sincere in their wish to secure a man of principle and ability — insisting upon only one stipulation in their choice, that he should not be prejudiced against the organization — as they were in their wish not to antagonize the voters at large, which the nomination of an incompetent or unknown man must surely do. In this dilemma not a few of them caught gladly at Ellis's suggestion that Speaker Ordway should be the candidate for the nomination decided upon to oppose Downes, since his integrity and ability was a matter of general knowledge, while he was at the same time a loyal organization man; but the majority were still in doubt.

“And yet,” as Verney told the young Speaker confidently toward the end of the month, “I think we'll convince them all by the time the convention is actually on.”

Ordway smiled a little at his friend's positive tone.

“You're an optimist, Verney,” he said, “but I'm sure I hope you're right. I think New York's had a little too much of Mr. Downes, and if the State needs me, if our friends think I'm the right man to meet the needs of the situation, I shall be proud to make the best fight I can against him to get the nomination. But

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I don't believe, I can't think it's going that way. I've a kind of notion the Egotist [he meant the Governor] will get it again." He turned his dark intellectual face and his dreamer's eyes toward his friend. "It's not probable, at least it does n't sound likely to me that a man as young as I am, only thirty-four years old, should be Governor." He made the statement seriously, for in the eyes of as stanch a Republican as he was, receiving the nomination was synonymous with being elected. But you could n't discourage Verney that way.

"Why not?" he said hotly. "Age has n't anything to do with it. Why, Patrick Henry was a senator at twenty-nine,—a few months younger than the age required by the Constitution. William Pitt was only twenty-five when he was prime minister of England; and think of Alexander Hamilton and LaFayette! They were statesmen and young men too! There's no reason why you should n't be anything you like, as far as age goes!"

And he was right in a way; there was no real reason why Oliver Ordway should not have made an excellent governor. He was young, of course, but in every other way eminently qualified. He had force of character, brains, and intellect, or he would not have risen to be what he was, Speaker of the House at Albany. He had graduated with high honors at one of the leading universities of the country, and had been admitted to the bar a few years afterwards. He was also a young man of large private fortune, doubled by his marriage to one of the rich Misses Brock of his own city, whose

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inheritance was almost equal to his own. Thus endowed, he had been able to give up his law practice and devote himself exclusively to a political career, which was one reason perhaps why he held office so much above his friend Ellis.

In other respects the two young men were much alike; typical New Yorkers, both of them, about the same age, well-born, fine-looking, and ambitious. The chief point of dissimilarity lay in their circumstances; for while one was rich, the other only belonged to a family which had once been rich. In character, too, the young men differed a little; for while both were actuated by the same lofty ideals and principles in going into politics, the older of the two was perhaps more idealistic and less practical than the younger. Ordway was nevertheless fully qualified to maintain an important administrative position; for if he was not always practical himself, he possessed the faculty of choosing competent subordinates who were, and to a great degree the rare power of making them work in harmony.

With this light on his character and ability, it is not difficult to believe with Verney in Ordway's fitness to be Governor of New York State, and to understand the earnestness and complete absorption with which Ellis threw himself into the business of getting him the Republican nomination for that office. Obviously Verney was a very busy young man; and it was unfortunate, perhaps, that Harriet Rand, accompanied by her aunt, should choose to arrive in New York just at this time, because he would really have liked to see more of

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her. Harriet, however, was quite unaware of this state of affairs, and she and Mrs. Cumloch had hardly been in the Holland House long enough for their trunks to be unpacked, before she sent the young man a note telling him of her arrival, as he had asked her to do whenever she came to New York, in supreme confidence that immediate sight of him would follow. But sad, very sad to relate, nothing at all came of it. Verney Ellis, working almost continually night and day, could not find time even to telephone, and the result was that the impossible happened and three whole days passed without sight or sound of him. This was a contretemps most inexplicable to Miss Rand, who had been used to having men fly at the beckon of her hand; and she could not in the least understand an absorption in other affairs that would not permit of a ten-minute call.

Then at last she saw him, but saw him merely, with no opportunity to speak. In despair of his coming, and to show herself that she was not disappointed, she arranged a theatre party for the fourth evening of her stay in New York, composed of herself and her aunt, a Mr. and Mrs. Chittenden, friends of Mrs. Cumloch, and a young man who had been Francis Morton's room-mate at college and who lived in New York. His name was Gerald Merrick, and needless to say, he was a great admirer of the Chicago heiress, whom he had met while visiting Francis several years before.

The play was very good, and Mr. Merrick as entertaining as he knew how to be, and Harriet had almost

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forgotten the extraordinary behavior of Mr. Ellis, when something occurred which brought back to her mind most keenly her sense of his delinquency. She and the other two women in the party were standing on the steps of the theatre after the play, waiting for the men to find their carriage, when Harriet observed not far away from her an extremely handsome and beautifully dressed woman, evidently waiting as they were for a carriage. Doubtless her escort, whoever he was, had gone down into the crowd in front of the Bijou to hasten the arrival of the equipage in question, even as Mr. Chittenden and young Gerald Merrick had done. There was nothing at all remarkable about this circumstance, and Harriet was just wondering why she speculated on the matter at all, when a good-looking young man with an eagerness of manner that was familiar to her, detached himself from the crowd on the sidewalk below and, running up to the girl on the steps, said gayly and so distinctly that Harriet could not help hearing, “Here we are, Cora!”

It was Verney.

CHAPTER VI

THE EPISODE OF THE BRACELET

IT was this incident that made it difficult for Harriet to execute a commission with which Mrs. Presbey had charged her; namely, to call at Cornelia's mother's and leave there a certain diamond bracelet belonging to Mrs. Ellis. Mrs. Presbey had borrowed it on a recent visit to New York and had not yet sent it back. It was a family heirloom, and Mrs. Ellis had requisitioned it from her elder daughter in favor of her youngest, Carol, who was to be "introduced" that winter. Carol had more right to it, she had decided, than Cornelia, who, as she justly said, had managed to lose almost every other heirloom of the kind the family had ever possessed. Mrs. Presbey, after borrowing the piece of jewelry, was characteristically negligent about returning it; and now that her attention had been called to the fact that her mother really wished it returned, she hastened to send it back by the first means which presented itself, which happened to be by making use of her friend Harriet Rand's trip to New York at that time. This was, furthermore, in her opinion, the safest method that she could use, for like

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most women she was unwilling to trust the mails with anything of value.

Miss Rand accepted the responsibility without any demur, since it was Cornelia who asked the favor of her, and promised to give the bracelet into no hands but Mrs. Ellis's own. She in fact rather enjoyed the idea of going to the house where the Politician lived, until the incident of the evening before gave her such signal proof of the lightness with which her friend regarded their friendship. With hot cheeks she remembered the curious glance with which Verney's handsome companion favored her when he caught sight of Harriet and raised his hat; nor could the information revealed later by Gerald Merrick, that she was Mrs. Willie Gibbs, a certain very fashionable and well-known young married woman, at all lessen her sense that her friend had failed her.

She felt now that the commission she had accepted so light-heartedly was one of great difficulty; for in her disappointment that the young man should choose so to ignore her presence in New York in the face of the fact that he had time to go to the theatre with someone else, she had resolved that nothing should induce her to make any further effort to see him, though the shopping and visiting among their friends which her aunt had planned should keep them never so long in the city. And now, here was Cornelia's old bracelet to interfere, necessitating a journey into the very camp of the enemy and compelling her to run the chance of meeting Verney face to face in his own home! Never-

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theless and in spite of this feeling of reluctance, before very long she did manage to carry out the mission with which she had been entrusted, though she took care to go early in the afternoon, so that she might not encounter Verney, and she told herself as she went up the steps of that one of the row of brown stone fronts on West Twelfth Street which was Mrs. Ellis's, that she was very glad there was no possible chance of such a contingency. The maid at the door did not know whether Mrs. Ellis was at home or not. She would go upstairs and see, if Miss Rand — Harriet had given her her card — would come in and be seated. Harriet came in and was shown through a large front drawing-room with cheese-cloth draped chandeliers, closed blinds, and furniture still in its summer garb of brown holland, into a smaller one similarly conditioned.

“Mrs. Ellis has only just returned from Tuxedo,” explained the maid, “to open the house,” and after raising one of the shades, she departed to find out if her mistress were in.

Harriet seated herself in one of the big shapeless chairs in the middle of the room where a shaft of the August sunlight streamed through the uncurtained window, and looked about her. Here, then, was where her friend, the Politician lived,—or was he so much her friend? The question in her mind showed how far the apparition of Mrs. Gibbs and Verney on the steps of the theatre the other evening had gone toward shaking her faith in that regard. It was not a particularly

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handsome or elegant house, to judge by what she had seen so far. Certainly it would not bear comparison with the fresh magnificence of her aunt's home on the Drive in Chicago. It was high-ceilinged and gloomy, like most of the houses she had seen in New York, with the dark tapestry-hung walls, velvet hangings that were too well worn to trouble about putting them away, and heavy furniture belonging to a family mansion that had been furnished two or three decades ago. Like the reproductions of oil paintings on the walls, Aurora over the marble mantelpiece and the Sistine Madonna across the way, its worth was unquestioned though its style was not at all in accord with modern tastes and fashions. Yet here and there a little carved stand or gilt table or lamp of hammered brass gave evidence that later additions had been made to the furniture. Probably by the fastidious and extravagant Mrs. Presbey, whose ambition in life was to be up-to-date, Harriet thought; or maybe by Miss Ellis, who was coming out that winter, whom she did not know, and in whose behalf she was acting the part of special messenger in returning the diamond bracelet.

"Hello," said a voice unexpectedly; and Harriet, her thoughts thus surprisingly interrupted, looked up and beheld Verney regarding her in pleased surprise from the doorway.

"How do you do, Mr. Ellis?" she said as composedly as she could and as coldly, rising to her feet.

But Mr. Ellis apparently did not notice the coldness.

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"How awfully good of you to come and see me," he said, coming smilingly toward her, "when you knew I was too busy to come and see you!"

"I did n't!" said Harriet indignantly, and doing her best to withdraw the hand she had foolishly and quite mechanically offered him. "I came only to leave a bracelet for Cornelia — I mean for your mother" — she stammered rather confusedly; she was so afraid he would n't understand that her coming had been obligatory. "She wanted me to leave it with Mrs. Ellis!"

"Oh, yes, I know," said Verney; "I've heard nothing but that bracelet from mother and Carol ever since the Baby [that was his sister's nickname] thought of coming out. It was most awfully kind of you to bring it!"

But Harriet was not to be conciliated by fair words. "I would n't have thought of coming now, though," she said gravely, "if I had had any idea that I should meet you!"

The young man looked shocked. "Don't," he said, "don't say such things! It's cruel, when I'm so glad to see you — and when I am so ill, too," he added.

"Ill?" said Harriet, her resentment against him arrested by this idea.

"Yes," he said, "that's why you find me here instead of at my office, and it's all because I have n't had any sleep to speak of for the last six weeks or so."

"Really?" said Harriet, unable to keep the sympathy out of her voice. "That's bad, is n't it?"

"As bad as bad can be!" replied Ellis, encouraged,

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“and you never knew such a clock as there is in this house! Why, if you’ll believe me — last night it struck every hour!”

Harriet could n’t help laughing, and after that, of course, it was useless to keep up the pretence that she was displeased with him; moreover, as he stepped into the sunlight and took a chair near her, she saw with concern that he did look ill, or exceedingly tired, at least, and remembered compassionately his healthy, animated look when she saw him last June, with his out-of-doors tan and his alert, vigorous air.

“I’m sorry you’re not well,” she began sympathetically — but “Never mind me,” he cut in; “tell me about yourself. Tell me, in the first place, why you were so cross with me just now?”

Harriet hesitated. Should she tell him or would he be unduly flattered? However, she was a truthful, candid soul; so she took that risk and confessed bravely.

“Because I think it was so unkind of you not to come and see me when I sent you a note. You know you asked me to let you know when I came to New York. I thought we were friends, but —” She stopped and cast a very reproachful and attractive look at him from her Madonna eyes.

It was Verney’s turn to be sorry; in spite of appearances, he did have a conscience. “I know,” he said. “And you can’t think how badly I felt not to be able to go right off. I intended to — of course — before you left, but I’ve been too busy to manage it these last few days.”

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Harriet's eyes sparkled warmly. All her indignation returned in a flood. "Not too busy to go to the theatre," she could n't help saying, though it was the last thing she had meant to say.

Verney flushed unhappily. He had been guilty he knew of discourtesy if not of unfriendliness in disregarding that note, and her knowledge of how he had spent one of the evenings in question, made it impossible to continue to plead lack of time as an excuse. That he had asked her to let him know when she came to New York, in a moment of enthusiasm and without any idea that she would ever act upon the suggestion, he was also aware did not make him any less guilty, since it appeared she had chosen to do so. He was thoroughly ashamed, for he never intentionally hurt people's feelings; and although he rarely reaped the consequences of his habit of saying pleasant things that he meant only while he said them, he was always repentant when he did. In this case he was more than usually repentant, for he found that he cared more for Miss Rand's opinion of him than he had supposed, and he even discovered an unsuspected stir at his heart when he met her reproachful brown eyes.

"I am more sorry than I can say," he said humbly, and without attempting to explain the circumstance Harriet had mentioned, knowing, as he did, that it was without explanation. "I have behaved very badly, I know, and I don't suppose you will ever forgive me?"

Harriet's anger could hardly withstand such abject humility. Still it did not vanish immediately.

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"You don't deserve forgiveness," she said slowly; "I hate people who say what they don't mean!"

This charge surprised Verney, for while he acknowledged that he often forgot things after saying them, he did think he meant them at the time they were said.

"But you're mistaken," he said eagerly, "I did mean it, when I said it, I swear to the Lord I did!"

The *naïveté* of the speech saved the day for him by again amusing Harriet.

"You're quite hopeless," she said laughing. "I can't seem to make you understand the enormity of your offence at all. But I'll forgive you just the same, because you're so delightfully dense!"

Verney, who did n't care why he was forgiven, as long as that beatific state was an actual fact, smiled delightedly. "That is most kind," he said; "and I wish you would go on calling me names, it makes me feel better somehow!"

"Then I shan't do it," she said. "I don't want you to feel better; you have n't felt worse long enough." But her expression was by no means severe, and she added kindly, "And now tell me what it is you've been so busy about; I want to know how the Cause is progressing." The spoiled child that is in almost every heiress, that cannot help being a part of the nature of every young girl who has had all the money she wants to spend all her life and been surfeited with attention, and that had prompted her feeling that she had been slighted, was now quite appeased.

Verney beamed. "I hoped you would," he said, and

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felt suddenly that this very good-looking girl with her frank, straightforward ways was the one person he knew to whom he could talk openly about the things that lay nearest his heart.

"I've been working like a nailer," he said, "since I saw you out in Chicago. I took only a week off in July, when I went up to the woods with my Uncle Richmond — you must meet him, by the way, he is the best there is, and — as I told you at first — I've hardly as much as slept since I returned."

Harriet looked her concern. "But you must," she said, "you must sleep. If you lose your health, what will become of your career?"

Verney had never particularly, or in so many words, thought of himself as having a "career." The word had been so much used in connection with fictitious heroes in novels and on the stage that it had only a hackneyed significance to him; but he understood that Harriet used it because she really believed he had a career and that in the fullest sense of the word, and he felt grateful to her for the belief. More than anything was he grateful for the anxiety that her eyes showed so plainly as she made her plea. How very sweet it was of her to be so interested as that in what he did!

"Thanks," he said; "it's good of you to worry about it, although I would not have distressed you for anything. And I would n't tell you all this about myself, only I am awfully blue to-day, and there are n't a whole lot of people that I feel are interested in hearing, and I feel somehow, you are?"

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"I am," said Harriet quietly, "and I want to be your friend, to have you tell me things if it helps. I should be proud to be the confidante of —" she paused and smiled brightly at him — "of a politician!" she finished.

Verney had never before in his experience encountered anything like the utter charm of this candid hero-worship of which he was made the object, and although he recognized that her words were half playful, a thrill of pleasure went through him. The admiration of a young and ingenuous member of the other sex will often succeed in flattering a man not usually susceptible to flattery. He did care about his work more than anything else in life, and it was pleasant to have this very attractive girl care too; and Harriet in her supreme confidence that she was interested in the man on account of the career and not in the career on account of the man, showed more plainly than her natural reserve would have permitted if the reverse had been true, that she did care. No wonder that Verney's pulses quickened a little.

"Friendship is the finest thing in the world," he said, with the earnestness and enthusiasm of the man who knows nothing at all about that sentiment where women are concerned.

And "Yes," she agreed, with the conviction and finality of the girl who has had no experience as yet of any other sentiment.

"I have something rather interesting to tell you," he said next. "It's only in the air at present, nothing to count on at all — but they're talking about nominating

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me for Attorney-general if my friend Ordway gets the nomination for Governor." He flushed at Harriet's expression of pleased surprise.

"Oh," she said, "why did n't you tell me before? Do you think there's any chance he will get it?"

"It looks as though he might; we've got things started now in nice shape, and I should n't wonder at all if he carried the convention. We've had a test vote applied in thirteen of the Assembly Districts of New York and Kings Counties, and six of the New York Districts cast majorities against the renomination of the Governor, and the Kings County totals showed a net vote of more than two to one against him. Of course it's only a test, but does n't it look as if we had a good show to win?"

Harriet thought it did, but all unconsciously showed that her interest in that fact was on account of Ellis's prospects, not Ordway's.

"Then I should think you'd be almost sure of the Attorney-generalship!" she said.

But Verney laughed. "Not in the least," he said; "nothing's sure in this life, and in political life that's more than ever true."

"But you said you'd be offered it if Ordway were nominated?"

"No, I only said they were talking about offering it to me. What is more likely to happen is that they will change their minds and offer it to some one else."

"Oh, why?" she asked, disappointed.

He laughed. "No reason, except that it seems to be

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an established fact that the men who do the hard practical work of politics, are n't the ones to draw prizes."

"Must they work 'all for love and nothing for reward,' as the 'Faery Queen' has it?"

"Apparently, unless of course they're out for graft."

She shook her head. "I don't grasp the psychology of that."

He looked very thoughtful. "It's their own fault," he said seriously, "the politicians' own fault. Because many of them are n't honest and disinterested, because many of them work for their party for what there is in it, for what money they can make, because most of them are selfish. And that discredits them with the public. The people know, or most of them do, that to get anywhere or do anything there must be men in control who will point out the way to them, help them to form their opinions, get the average good but lazy citizen to vote; but they resent — and quite properly — the abuse of this service, and decline to consider for high office the men who take advantage of the power vested in them and make of it an article of commerce, to be bought and sold."

"What a pity!" said Harriet. "And so the poor things who work just as hard as the others and harder, but are not corrupt, have to suffer for the wrong-doing of the others!"

"Exactly. The innocent as usual suffer with the guilty. And that is why I am so pleased that they spoke of offering me the nomination for Attorney-gen-

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eral. Precedent to the contrary notwithstanding, you know, it would seem to indicate that honesty as an asset in the election to office is coming up in the world. And that's why I so much want Ordway, who is himself a hard-working, practical politician of principle, to win. It's my ambition, as I think I've told you, to remove the odium from the reputation of politicians, to make the title no longer a term of reproach; and with every appointment of the right kind of politician to office, it comes nearer gratification."

"I hope you will succeed," said Harriet. So absorbed were they in the conversation that neither of them saw the maid, who had returned from her trip upstairs to tell Miss Rand that Mrs. Ellis was not at home, come to the door that opened into the hall and after a moment of hesitation, retreat. Convinced that it was all right and that they did not need to hear from her, by the fact that "Mr. Verney" was talking to the young lady, she had tactfully withdrawn to another part of the house without interrupting them.

"I wish I could help you in some way, but I'm afraid there's nothing much a girl can do," added Miss Rand.

"Yes, there is," Verney assured her earnestly. "A girl can do a great deal. Just to know someone who has confidence in you, to have a friend who believes in you, is the greatest help in the world toward giving a man confidence in himself. And you can't do anything without confidence."

"And opportunity?" said Harriet.

"Yes, opportunity, of course. There are all sorts

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of those in politics, wrong opportunities to rise that mean the abandonment of your principles, and right ones. But it's only the right ones, of course, that a man regrets, the chances you lose through your own negligence. That's a hard thought, you know, to think you might have done something if only you had n't been asleep at the switch when Opportunity came along. A favorite poem of mine is on the subject. Would you like to see it? I think I have it with me?"

Harriet said she would very much indeed, and he opened his pocketbook and took out a newspaper clipping.

"It's by a man named Ingalls, and it's one of the best poems I know, classics not excepted," he said, handing it to her.

"You read it aloud," she suggested.

"If you wish," he said, and read these verses on "Opportunity":

"Master of human destinies am I;
Fame, Love, and Fortune on my footsteps wait;
Cities and fields I walk; I penetrate
Deserts and seas remote; and passing by
Hovel and mart and palace, soon or late
I knock unbidden once at every gate.
If sleeping, wake; if feasting, rise, before
I turn away. It is the hour of fate;
And they who follow me reach every state
Mortals desire, and conquer every foe
Save death; but those who doubt or hesitate,
Condemned to failure, penury, and woe,
Seek me in vain and uselessly implore;
I answer not, and I return no more."

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The voice of the reader shook into silence as the last sounding phrase rolled from his lips, momentous with warning, and sank into his heart and that of his listener.

"Fame, Love, and Fortune on my footsteps wait!" breathed Harriet, thrilling at the impressive words.

"I answer not, and I return no more!" repeated Ellis; "tremendous, is n't it?"

"Yes, but it's wrong. Because it does return, opportunity! I know a better philosophy than that, one of hope — and I have its teachings embodied here in another set of verses! See! Look!" And she rose in her eagerness and drew from her purse another clipping and thrust it into Verney's hand as he also rose.

"It's an answer to your poem, called by the same name, 'Opportunity.' It was written by Judge Walter Malone, and came out in the papers just after yours was published."

"I never saw it," said Verney. "Then you had read mine before?"

"No, I missed it when it came out, but I've always heard of it and wanted to read it."

Ellis drew a long breath. "It's rather an odd thing, quite an interesting coincidence," he said, "is n't it, that we should each unknown to the other have cut out and cherished question and answer like that?"

"Very interesting, very strange." Brown eye looked into blue eye in mutual wonder, and upon discovering the joy of the thing continued to gaze long after the wonder had left them — flushing cheek for the girl and

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accelerated breathing for the man testifying to the existence of a dangerous side to that fascinating employment.

"Read it," said Harriet presently — she was the first to drop her eyes — and held out the poem again.

"No," he said, "we'll read it together." And side by side, shoulder touching shoulder, they stood by the uncurtained window with the late afternoon sunshine falling over the brown roses in her hat and his smooth dark head, while their eyes travelled over the following lines to "Opportunity":

"They do me wrong who say I come no more,
When once I've knocked and failed to find you in;
For every day I stand outside your door
And bid you wake and rise, to fight and win.
Wail not for precious chances passed away,
Weep not for golden ages on the wane;
Each night I burn the records of the day;
At sunrise every soul is born again.
Laugh like a boy at splendors that have sped;
To vanished joys be blind and deaf and dumb;
My judgments seal the dead past with its dead,
But never bind a moment yet to come.
Though deep in mire, wring not your hands and weep;
I lend my arm to all who say 'I can.'
No shamefaced outcast ever sank so deep
But yet may rise and be again a man.
Dost thou behold thy lost youth all aghast?
Dost reel from righteous retribution's blow?
Then turn from blotted archives of the past,
And find the future's pages white as snow.
Art thou a mourner? Rouse thee from thy spell.
Art thou a sinner? Sins may be forgiven.
Each morning gives thee wings to flee from Hell,
Each night a star to guide thy feet to Heaven!"

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"Is n't that wonderful?" cried Ellis as they finished. "Why, a man could conquer the world after reading that! I swear to the Lord he could! 'Each night I burn the records of the day; at sunrise every soul is born again!' Could anything be finer?"

"And, 'laugh like a boy at splendors that have sped; to vanished joys be blind and deaf and dumb!' Oh, Verney," rejoined Harriet, scarcely conscious that she had said his name, she had called him so in her heart so long, "is n't that fine?"

"Great!" agreed the young man enthusiastically.

"And don't you believe it? Is n't it all truer than the other?"

"I'm sure of it! Yours teaches courage and hope — mine, despair. Can you let me have this copy? I know a number of other men who will be the better for reading it."

"Of course; I have another. Besides, I know them by heart."

"Thanks," he said; "you don't know how much good you've done me. I was feeling awfully blue and down on my luck this afternoon, and you and your poem have inspired me all over again — set me on my feet."

He seized her hands impulsively as he spoke.

At this moment his mother appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER VII

FAME, LOVE, AND FORTUNE

MRS. ELLIS had just returned from a shopping trip down town, and having let herself in with a latch-key, had not been warned by the maid that she had a visitor. Voices from the sitting-room first intimated that some one was there, and as she expected her youngest daughter Carol down from Tuxedo that afternoon, she was not at all surprised. That young woman had put off leaving that delightful place until the last possible moment and was to take a later train to the city than her mother's. Mrs. Ellis therefore entered the room on the supposition that her daughter had arrived and that one of the voices was hers and the other that of her son Vernor, whom she had left in the house feeling rather indisposed, when she went down town that morning.

She was a tall, heavily built woman with a plain fashion of dress, gorgeous rings on the small, well-formed hands, from which she had just stripped the gloves, and a regularity of profile which a rapidly developing double chin had not yet destroyed. A pair of piercing blue eyes behind her glasses united with severely dressed gray hair to give her an expression of severity; and Harriet, as she saw her standing in the

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doorway and realized whom she must be, made up her mind at once that explanations to this uncompromising and aristocratic old lady would be difficult to make. For her part, Mrs. Ellis peering near-sightedly at them through her glasses down the long stretch of dim-lit drawing-room, where they stood now in the shadow, came to the conclusion as she took in the fact that the man and the girl had been standing with clasped hands, that Carol had only just arrived, and that brother and sister were greeting each other; though even as she came to this conclusion, a vague surprise at the tenderness of that greeting crossed her mind. Carol and Vernor were seldom demonstrative toward each other, and their relations had been noted in the family for being of the cat-and-dog variety which usually obtains between big brothers and little sisters. However, it was on this supposition that she addressed the two ill-defined figures standing in mute self-consciousness at the other end of the room.

“Is that you, Carol?” she asked. “I did n’t know you were here. I’ve only just returned from down town myself.”

Harriet started. It was worse than she had thought. Mrs. Ellis had not seen the maid, then, and did not know who she was. If she had been troubled at the thought of explaining how she came to know Verney so well, how much more apprehensive did she become when it dawned upon her that Mrs. Ellis had just come in from the street and that she had not been in the house during the entire conversation with Verney. What had hap-

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pened to the maid, then, until whose return only she had allowed the young man to beguile the moments? And how mean of Verney not to have told her at once that his mother was out! But then she should have asked him, perhaps, and perhaps he did n't really know! It was more Cornelia's fault, after all, that she found herself in such a position, for asking her to undertake the commission of the bracelet.

While these thoughts passed swiftly through Harriet's mind, Mrs. Ellis had turned and was going toward the hall, evidently taking silence for consent in the matter of having her question answered, and then it was the kind of question that does n't require an answer.

"I'm going up to rest before dinner," she said; "you children be ready on time, won't you? I've brought only Wilson and Katy down with me to-day, so we'll have it early."

She would have gone without realizing that she was not speaking to her daughter, and Harriet would have been spared the unpleasant task of enlightening her; but Harriet was not that kind of girl. She had no intention of sparing herself at the cost of deceiving Mrs. Ellis and setting a clandestine seal upon her meeting with Verney; so in spite of the young man's protest — for he knew his mother's deep-dyed veneration for the conventions and had whispered that she had "better let it go at that, and bring the bracelet another day," — she ran after Mrs. Ellis and caught up with her at the foot of the stairs.

"Oh, Mrs. Ellis!" she cried, rather breathlessly,

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"you've made a mistake! I'm not your daughter at all. I'm Harriet Rand, and I came to return Cornelia's bracelet."

Mrs. Ellis, who had just gathered her skirt for the ascent of the stairs, relinquished it at this surprising address, in favor of adjusting her glasses.

"What, what?" she said, "I don't understand. Who did you say you were?" Then upon perceiving that the person she was speaking to was a young and attractive girl of about Carol's age, she spoke more kindly. "What is it, my dear? And what is your name? I should know it, I know, but Carol has so many friends it's hard to remember them all."

Harriet saw that the older woman did not connect her with the girl she had seen with Verney the moment before, and that she had more probably jumped to the conclusion that this young girl was a friend whom Carol had brought with her. This made her task more difficult and embarrassed her still more, though at the same time it only made her all the more determined to make it clear to Mrs. Ellis who she really was.

"I'm Harriet Rand of Chicago," she repeated desperately; "I know your daughter, Mrs. Presbey, and she asked me to give you this bracelet." Harriet held it out to her. "I called this afternoon for that purpose, hoping to see you; and while the maid was gone to find out if you were at home your son came in and entertained me."

If Cornelia Presbey had done as she had told Harriet she would do, and had written her mother that Harriet

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was coming, and on what errand, the mere mention of the word "bracelet" would have revealed the situation to Mrs. Ellis at once, and all would have been plain sailing. But Cornelia the dilatory, Cornelia the forgetful, who was always going to do and never did, had forgotten again. And the consequence was that the only part of Harriet's speech that the older lady noticed was the part that seemed to have reference to the confidential and intimate attitude in which she had discovered this stranger and her son, upon first entering the room, and which now seemed to her to require explanation.

"So you know my son, do you," she asked coldly, and stopped as if for further enlightenment as to the exact degree of Harriet's knowledge. Verney from the doorway where he had been anxiously observing his mother unobserved by her, now stepped forward to take his part in the explanations; but Harriet, whose blood was up by this time and who suddenly felt not at all afraid of the rather formidable old lady she had been talking to, waved him back.

"Yes," she said, in leisurely accents; "I know your son. I met him out in Chicago some time ago." She looked Mrs. Ellis squarely and calmly in the eye. "Here's your bracelet," she added, "that Cornelia asked me to bring"; and putting the little package into Mrs. Ellis's unheeding hand, she turned to Verney.

"I'm ready to go home, now," she said, "if you'll take me."

Either the look or the bracelet or the sound of her

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daughter's name must have enlightened Mrs. Ellis at last, or perhaps it was the noble air of the girl and her spirit that proved sufficient guarantee of her utter lack of a guilty conscience; for all in a moment the older woman recognized that she had made a mistake in questioning her conduct in any way, and coming swiftly forward took Harriet's hand with all graciousness.

"I see!" she said, "you've brought me back my bracelet. How very good of you, and how very stupid of Cornelia not to let me know you were coming!—it has made me so slow about realizing who you were."

"It does n't matter at all, Mrs. Ellis," replied Harriet, relieved to find that it was only Cornelia's carelessness and not the unfortunate attitude in which she and Verney had been caught that had caused Mrs. Ellis's doubt of her. "And I'm very glad to have been of any service."

"It was nice of you to bring it," reiterated Mrs. Ellis, "and I'm very grateful to Cornelia for sending such a delightful emissary with this troublesome piece of jewelry. She knew I would like to meet you."

"Of course she did!" corroborated Verney, asserting himself now, his eyes kindling with admiration for the character Harriet had shown in handling a rather difficult situation. "And look here, mother, I want Miss Rand to stay to dinner!"

"So do I, if she can stay," returned his mother instantly, smiling at Harriet.

"That's settled then. Here, let's have your coat!" he said, before Harriet had time to speak.

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"But I must n't!" she expostulated. "I have to get home!"

"No, you don't; you told me you did n't have anything else to do and you'd stay if you were asked!" fabricated Verney, deftly removing the coat which Harriet had not intended to yield.

"I did n't say any such thing," she said, half laughing, half indignant. "Don't believe him, Mrs. Ellis, will you?" And she threw that lady a beseeching glance.

"As if I would!" replied the Politician's mother, with a look of pretended scorn at her son. "Don't you suppose I know Verney! But that need n't bother us at all. Independent of his wishes in the matter it would make me very happy to have you stay. I expect my daughter down from Tuxedo every minute, and I should like to have her meet you."

Harriet hesitated and demurred again, but Mrs. Ellis was so sincere and so urgent, and the look in Verney's eye so threatening, that she at last allowed herself to be persuaded.

"That's nice," said Mrs. Ellis; "it's a very informal way to ask you, I know, but then it's the informal season now, before everybody gets back to town. I've only just arrived myself!"

"That's so," said Verney, anxiously. "I forgot that. There'll be something to eat for dinner, mother?"

"Those ducks your Uncle Richmond shot. Wilson brought them down with him to-day; and maybe, bread

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and butter!" replied his mother, smiling. "Will that do?"

"Oh, you know very well that's not all!" said Ellis, laughing. His mother showed a certain relish for teasing him at times that often caught him unawares.

"And that reminds me," remarked Mrs. Ellis from the stairs, "your uncle is coming to dinner, too; he may come with Carol."

"Fine business!" commented Verney to Harriet. "You'll like my Uncle Richmond; he's a wonder!"

And Harriet agreed with him when a little later, after she had telephoned her aunt about her plan to stay to dinner at Mrs. Ellis's, Mr. Vernor arrived in company with Carol Ellis.

Richmond Vernor was a tall, finely-built man with the clean-shaven face of youth and the gray hair of middle age. He didn't look in the least like Verney; but Harriet, as she shook hands with him noticed several points of resemblance between him and his sister, Mrs. Ellis. She was impressed, however, with his cordial, courteous manner and the humorous kindness of his brown eyes. Verney's sister Carol resembled him slightly, but looked more like Cornelia Presbey. She had the same very fair hair and irregularly attractive features.

"I've heard Cornelia talk about you ever so often," said Miss Ellis, very small, very slight, and rather pretty, clasping Harriet's hand warmly as Verney made the necessary introductions and explanations. "And

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I do think," as her brother finished telling the history of the bracelet and its restoration to its rightful owners, "it was nice of you to bring me back the bracelet. Cornelia's such an old slowcoach I thought I'd never see it again!"

Harriet thoroughly enjoyed the dinner, served in the large, dark, high-ceilinged dining-room panelled in black walnut, with the ubiquitous brown holland covers on the seats of the black walnut chairs.

"Why didn't Wilson take off those old covers, mamma?" said Carol, looking about with discontent at the brown holland aspect of the room.

"My dear," replied her mother indulgently, "give the poor man a minute! We've only come to town to-day, and you know we're back a whole month earlier than usual this year."

"On father's account?" asked Verney.

A shadow crossed Mrs. Ellis's face.

"Yes," she said; "although Delia" — Delia was the cook, who had been in charge of the house all summer while her mistress was in Tuxedo — "looks after him pretty well, I don't like to leave him alone any longer than I can help."

The Politician was silent. He knew his mother's reason for not wishing to leave his father alone was the nervous condition of Mr. Ellis's health, which was supposed to have been the immediate result of a long succession of business reverses. A feeling of remorse came over Verney that he had not himself been with him more. There was no excuse for it, living as he

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had been in the same house with his father more or less all summer; and he went on eating without saying anything.

"Carol has already begun to worry about her *début*, I see," remarked Mr. Vernor, glancing mischievously at his niece. "She's afraid you'll leave the brown hollands on then, Helen!" And he smiled at his sister.

"I'm not at all! I was n't thinking of it!" denied Carol, blushing furiously to prove she had been. "You think you know everything, Uncle Ritchie!"

"I should think he did too," observed Verney, waking up, "to judge by your blushes."

"Quite a sunset!" chimed in young Miss Ellis's other tormentor. "You must get over that habit, Baby, or people will never believe you're really out! Ask Miss Rand if that is n't so. I'm sure she was n't half so nervous about it all as you are."

"On the contrary," protested Harriet, coming to the rescue of the tormented one, though she smiled reassuringly at the older man for whom she had conceived a sudden liking, "I was so nervous and excited about my coming-out reception that when the great day came I did n't want to go down at all, and begged my aunt to let me stay in my room."

"But she did n't let you?" queried Miss Ellis, horrified expostulation in every tone.

"Yes," said Verney solemnly, "they let her; and all the people who came to meet the beautiful Miss Rand went away in tears, they were so disappointed."

"How can you be so ridiculous?" laughed Harriet.

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She didn't stay very long after dinner, for Mrs. Cumloch had promised to send her maid in a cab at nine o'clock. And as Harriet and the two men stood in the hall waiting for the cab to arrive, Mrs. Ellis and Carol having lingered in the dining-room to give some instructions to Wilson, Mr. Vernor said, putting his arm about Verney's shoulders as he spoke,

"This is a great fellow, Miss Rand, if you didn't know it before. We call him 'The Politician' in the family just by way of a joke, but no one takes him and his career seriously except me, and I'm betting on him!" he added playfully, slapping his nephew affectionately on the back as he spoke.

The Politician turned a sparkling eye on his uncle and smiled gratefully. "I couldn't do anything if you weren't," said he.

"I'm betting on him too," asserted Harriet, with the nicest kind of a glance at the young man.

"Then he can't help winning," Mr. Vernor replied quickly.

"With two such friends to believe in me," said Ellis lightly, "it would be a pity if I didn't! I'll probably wake some morning before long and find myself famous."

"Yes, with your qualifications all you have to do is to take advantage of your opportunities, and Fame, Love and Fortune, as it said in the poem, are yours!" Harriet said.

"Fame and Fortune, perhaps, if I'm lucky," said Ellis soberly.

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"And why not Love?" asked the girl, too sure of herself to consider the question personal at all.

"A man can't expect everything," replied Ellis, knowing that in so replying he was avoiding the issue. The arrival of Mrs. Cumloch's maid was announced, and Harriet made her graceful acknowledgments and departed. When Verney had returned from putting Miss Rand into the cab he found his uncle, who had been too tactful to go too, still standing in the hall where he had left him.

"It's a great thing to have a career, Uncle Ritch," he said, "is n't it?" — yawning to show that he did n't more than half mean what he said.

Mr. Vernor roused himself as if from a deep reverie.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully; "you're a very lucky fellow, Verney." But Ellis felt instinctively that the remark had reference to something other than his chances to be famous.

CHAPTER VIII

MRS. GIBBS ON "RESPONSIBILITY"

HARRIET now saw a great deal of Carol Ellis. The two had taken a great fancy to each other, and it was through Carol that Miss Rand met Verney's friend, Mrs. Oliver Ordway, although the Politician, who had been anxious to have them know each other, had been largely influential in bringing the meeting about. It was to oblige Verney, too, that Mrs. Ordway had invited Harriet to a little theatre party she gave one evening, an invitation Harriet accepted unhesitatingly, in spite of her aunt's murmur of protest that she didn't quite like her niece to be so much with people she didn't know herself, although she admitted that the people in question were as nice as could be wished. Harriet, however, gently and persuasively contested this idea. It was sufficient, she thought, if she, Harriet, knew them. What was the use of being an heiress and twenty-four years old if you couldn't do about what you liked? And as usual it ended in unqualified surrender on her aunt's part.

Mrs. Ordway made a very deep impression upon the young girl, who thought she had seldom seen any one more gracious and more interesting; and Agnes Ordway

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was both. Though all unacknowledged, the loneliness of her life — wife as she was to a man engrossed in politics to the exclusion of every other interest — had lent her lovely dark-blue eyes an infinitely pathetic expression. And her restless motions and quick manner of speaking would have betrayed to any one who knew the circumstances, her utter weariness of herself, her impatience of a fate which made no demand upon her many noble qualities, and her unconscious longing for that settled kind of life which is the truest aspect of domesticity, and which her husband's career as a public character made absolutely impossible.

There were only four in Mrs. Ordway's theatre party that Thursday night, Mrs. Ordway and Harriet, and Verney and his uncle, Richmond Vernor. Mr. Vernor, with his nephew, had the pleasure of knowing his hostess very well. Harriet was very much pleased when Mrs. Ordway called for her that evening, to find Mr. Vernor of the party, for she liked Verney's uncle, and, with her usual rather youthful but quite attractive enthusiasm, had continued to be pleased with everything that happened during the evening from the play to the *café* where they went for supper. It was a small place on the first floor of a building on the corner of Fortieth and Sixth Avenue, very popular just then for the purpose in spite of the noise from the elevated which roared outside its west windows. There was nothing very much out of the ordinary about it, however, except that often during the evening some

Mrs. Gibbs on "Responsibility"

popular actress or singer of the day would be secured to vary the programme of entertainment furnished by a green-coated band at the end of the room.

As Mrs. Ordway and her party took their places, Harriet looked interestedly about her at the low-raftered ceiling bright with many colored lights, the bold design of the mural decoration, the waiters standing at attention by each table, and the crowd of nice-looking people with their distinctly on-pleasure-bent appearance.

"What a delightful place!" she said.

"It's very popular," said her hostess; "if it were a little later when everybody is back, we should have had to have a table reserved to find one unoccupied."

Yet in spite of the fact that "everybody" was not back the room seemed crowded enough, and many notables were represented. At a table to their right sat a thin-faced, freckled, light-haired woman dining with another woman and three men, to whom Mrs. Ordway bowed. Upon asking who she was Harriet was told that she was the recently divorced wife of a well-known millionaire, who had not been content with the charms of light hair and freckles alone. At another was a new comet of the theatrical sky who had lately "swam into public ken," and made a sensation, chiefly on the strength of having mastered the English language in eighty days, more or less, and her ability to wear impossibly high collars. At still another an Englishwoman, who had written a book much adver-

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tised by its immoral character, was dining with the actor whom she had persuaded to play the part of her loose-lived hero in a dramatized version, and the manager who was about to make, or was at least expecting to make, his eternal fortune by producing it.

"You can't tell, though, Agnes," remarked Verney, "whether the place will be as much patronized this season as it was last. That a thing's popular one year is no sign it will be the next year. Not in New York, at least."

"Perhaps not. I wonder if they'll have some singing to-night; it's so warm and pleasant I rather thought they would."

As Mrs. Ordway spoke, the attention of the party was attracted by a commotion of some sort at the street door. A man who looked like an Italian organ-grinder — slouch hat, dark flashing eyes, and generally picturesque appearance — seemed to be trying to get in, and a number of waiters to be trying to keep him out. Verney called a waiter and asked him what it was all about, and the man told them the organ-grinder was trying to get permission to sing to the people in the restaurant. "He says he has a fine voice and would like to entertain the ladies and gentlemen," explained the waiter. Hardly had the amusement subsided, which this singular request on the part of the organ-grinder had occasioned Mrs. Ordway and her party, when to their surprise they saw the Italian being escorted to the platform at the end of the restaurant.

After a brief speech in which the proprietor ex-

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plained that he was induced to let the man have his way in the hope of providing his patrons with something new in the way of entertainment, the smiling street-musician stepped forward and in an excellent imitation of an Italian speaking broken English, told his now thoroughly expectant audience that he was sorry he had to leave his organ outside, — that, he thought, would have amused them more, but there was a little song they sang in his country he would like them to hear; and began without more ado to sing. It was a very beautiful song, and the singer's voice a marvel of expression and sweetness; and when the last chords of the accompaniment which the green-coated band had played throughout had ceased, the people understood, those who understood music at all, that they had been privileged to hear a performance of no ordinary merit but of unusual quality, and the applause was instantaneous and prolonged.

"He could beat the angel Israfel at his own game," said Verney, as the singer nodding and smiling came down from the platform and began to pass his hat, "but for all that I don't believe he's any organ-grinder; it's one of Antoni's put-up jobs." Antoni was the proprietor of the restaurant.

"You mean you think it's a fake?" said his uncle.

"Yes. Didn't you notice his hands? They were as white as a woman's, and you'll observe that he did n't keep the money he collected, but passed it over to Antoni there."

"I believe you're right," commented Mrs. Ordway.

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"Street musicians don't usually wear diamond rings, and he had one on his little finger."

"Oh, there's no doubt about it," said Verney; "it's just one of Antoni's little schemes to draw the crowd. You see if it is n't!"

And a paragraph in the paper the next morning proved the truth of his surmise and acquainted the world at large with the fact that Antoni had surprised his patrons again, and that a more or less well-known concert singer had consented for a "consideration" to disguise himself as an organ-grinder and give the diners in the restaurant one song.

It was toward the end of the little stir of excitement attendant upon this incident that three persons, a woman and two men, came in and seated themselves at the vacant table just to the left of Mrs. Ordway's party. As they took their places, Harriet was aware that she had seen the woman before; that faultless figure and pale gold hair were certainly familiar, likewise the deliberate stare of the fine dark eyes. It was only a moment, however, before she recognized her. "It's 'Cora'!" she thought, realizing that the woman at the other table was the same whom she had seen with Verney that evening at the theatre a night or two after her arrival in New York.

"There's Mrs. Willie Gibbs," said Ellis at that moment, nodding and smiling at the people who had just come in.

"With Mr. Gibbs," said Mrs. Ordway, "wonder of wonders!" bowing and smiling too.

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"Oh, well, Stevie Cass is with her too," said Mr. Vernor; "don't forget that!"

"And Stevie is a nice boy," said Ellis, pleasantly, "and amusing too. And you know how amusing William M. Gibbs, bank president, is!"

Everybody laughed.

"Not that he is n't a very good sort," added Verney hastily, for fear he might be misunderstood to be "knocking" a friend of his; for he really liked Mr. Gibbs; then he lost interest apparently in the subject and in the next table, and devoted himself to Harriet. This he did so successfully that she forgot all about the troubled feeling she had had at sight of the irresistible "Mrs. Willie," and glowed and laughed and was so obviously interested in what the young man was saying, that Mrs. Ordway and Richmond Vernor exchanged significant glances once or twice in the midst of their own equable and intelligent conversation, and green flame shot from the hazel eyes of Mrs. Willie Gibbs at the sight, and poor Stevie Cass was unable to please her in any way he tried.

In a handsome apartment building on Madison Avenue near Fifty-sixth Street, a few evenings later, the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs sat in an attitude of expectancy. Her husband had gone to one of the numerous banquets which, as president of the New York Association of Bankers, he was obliged to attend, and she was free to spend her evening as she chose. That she chose to spend it in talking with a young and unat-

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tached bachelor some five years her junior was, she thought, no concern of Mr. Gibbs; and Mr. Gibbs thought so too; but his opinion on the subject was like a taste for Hokusai,—a matter of education, the result of a gentle course of training through which his wife had put him.

So finished a process was this training that the hard-working, money-making banker had come to the conclusion that it was his own original idea that a married woman should have all the liberty she wanted, and that as long as his wife was amused he did not at all care who amused her. If he had ceased to be able to amuse her himself, that was his own fault—a very broad-minded and unprejudiced theory, but not one that Mrs. Gibbs would have permitted him to apply to his own case. For him to have attempted to seek distraction beyond the confines of his own hearthstone would instantly have brought the roof about his ears. For it just happened to be true, in spite of her fondness for flirtation, that young Mrs. Gibbs loved her elderly husband. Perhaps, too, his confidence in this fact was the secret of his docility in the matter of permitting her to amuse herself with other men. If, however, he had been so foolish as to indulge in jealousy, of all the young men who took pleasure in the society of his handsome wife, James Vernor Ellis would have been the one to arouse the emotion.

The two, Mrs. Gibbs and the young man, had known each other since their school-days, and had always had the warmest kind of friendship, which at times hovered,

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dangerously or delightfully, as you choose, near the borderland of flirtation, and in their very young days had come pretty close to being a love affair. Even as recently as the day when Mrs. Gibbs, as Miss Cora Keator, had told her friend of her engagement to the elderly banker, it was in the nature of a blow to Ellis's young affections. But when with grieved lips and a hurt look in his eyes, he had told her so, Miss Keator had only laughed and rubbed his hair the wrong way — a thing Verney particularly disliked and had always refused to let her do — and called him "a funny boy"; and then with cruel kindness had analyzed his true feelings in the matter with a penetration that was not to be denied, and showed him that the last thing in the world he really wished was to marry a woman five years older than himself. After the wedding she had spent a year abroad, during the first part of which Verney hardly had felt able to smile; but later on had come to realize that life was worth living even though Cora Keator was married; and by the time she and her husband had returned, he had so far recovered his usual equanimity that he had been the first person to greet them at the dock. Since when he had adapted himself to the new basis of friendship with the greatest cheerfulness and had been almost as devoted to the fascinating Cora as ever. Her marriage, he found, made no difference at all in her fondness for his society; and Mr. Gibbs was such a good sort he seemed rather to encourage Verney to see his wife than otherwise.

Cora Gibbs, for her part, had accepted the young

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man's devotion with equal satisfaction, though not in quite the same spirit. Womanlike, she was unable altogether to forget that there had been a time when things were different, when he cherished a warmer sentiment for her than mere friendship; and while she did not actually desire a conflagration, she was still anxious at least to keep the old fire lit.

The idea, then, that Verney was paying attention to Harriet Rand, was perhaps in love with her — which his absorption in her the other evening at the restaurant, a laughing word to that effect from Mrs. Ordway, and her own jealous fears all led her to entertain — was extremely distasteful to her. She could n't marry him herself certainly, and she would n't have wished to if it had been possible; nevertheless she did not want any other woman to marry him. In a word, she was just fond enough of him not to be able to imagine her world without Verney in it, and would have gone far to prevent its becoming so; for although sufficiently generous in other matters, she did n't care in the least how selfish she was about this particular young man, whose homage she had allowed to become indispensable to her happiness.

The truth was that Cora Gibbs belonged to that dog-in-the-manger class of married women who think nothing of binding a young bachelor to them by every art known to their sex, and then proceeding to make it their life's business to keep him from marrying, although they have themselves exercised that prerogative. This act of concentrated selfishness they disguise

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under a professed interest in the welfare of the victim, urging upon him the inexpediency of marrying too young and by interfering here and advising there, generally succeed in tiding him along until the habit of bachelorhood becomes fixed upon him and he learns to look only to his worst enemy for all his joy.

It was on account of this selfish side of Mrs. Gibbs's friendship for Verney that she found the thought that he was on the point of breaking his chains so very hard to bear; for if her friendship had been of the right kind, she would have rejoiced in the event of his marrying happily. Her feeling of surprise that he had not at least confided in her regarding this recent fancy of his added also to her disturbed state of mind. But this was because she did not really know Ellis so well as she believed she did. She would have said, if any one had asked her, that so strong was the bond between them there was no thought the young man had of which she was not aware, and that he confided in her about everything. But she was mistaken. No woman ever really knows a man any more than any man ever really knows a woman; and Mrs. Gibbs, in supposing that Verney Ellis was hers to do with as she would, was only making the same mistake which any other woman no less intelligent would have made under the same circumstances.

As a matter of fact, Ellis was not at all the kind of man to fall a victim to the selfishness of the young married woman. He had far too much character, and the reason he didn't tell her all his secrets was not

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that he did n't have any to tell, but because they had nothing to do with her.

It was nearly nine, and the beautiful Cora looked very impatiently at the clock. Verney was late, just when she was most anxious to see him; for she meant to find out that very evening if there was any truth in Mrs. Ordway's gossip about the young man and the Chicago heiress. She made a very pretty picture with her yellow gown, white skin, and sparkling hair; and Verney arriving a moment later did not miss a detail of it.

"I thought you were never coming!" said she, rising to greet him and displaying her beautiful figure to much advantage in the act.

"I'm awfully sorry, Cora!" said Ellis, taking both the hands she gave him in graceful welcome and holding them for a moment; "but I could n't get here earlier. I'm so busy these weeks before the convention I really should not have come at all." A harassed expression passed over his face.

"Never mind, as long as you've come," returned the young married woman; "I waited dinner a little while for you, it's true, but it does n't matter a bit. Willie is the only person who minds when dinner is late, and he's dining out to-night."

"You must n't ask me again," said Ellis earnestly; "it's no use. I can never make it, and it only puts you out."

"Not in the least," replied Mrs. Gibbs tranquilly, "and we'll have some of it together anyhow." She

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laughed, pressed an electric button, and on the appearance of the butler asked him to bring whiskey and soda.

Verney selected a low chair very near her and sat down. He knew he was going to enjoy the evening although he knew equally well that he should not spend it in that way, that the "Cause" was calling him; for his friend Ordway was not by any means so strong a possibility for the nomination as he would have liked to have him. But after all, why not? He was n't a slave; the laborer was worthy of his hire, and he had a right to take an evening off once in a while. And Mrs. Willie Gibbs was such good company! In her society he felt such a delightful sense of security, that he might say anything he chose, and his friend would understand. And he knew also — and expected much entertainment from the fact, that there was nothing Mrs. Gibbs, smart, sophisticated, and worldly-wise, dared not say. Also that she was at her daringest with him.

"Tell me something new," he said, sipping his whiskey contentedly and glancing at the evening paper she had laid down to greet him; "I have n't read the paper yet, I've been too busy."

"In other words 'Amuse me, slave'?" laughed Mrs. Gibbs.

"That's what I came for," he acknowledged.

"Well, there's nothing amusing in the paper," she told him; "not a thing in it, except that hogs are declining again! Disagreeable, rude things! I can't see

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why they should be so exclusive, can you?" She laughed at her own conceit and Ellis joined her.

"Oh, well," he said, "gossip then! Who's going to get divorced from whom?"

"Implying that I'm well up in scandal? It's too bad of you, Verney; you're always accusing me of that, and really, I don't gossip a bit."

"Not a bit — only a whole lot," returned Ellis cheerfully; "but I was n't criticising, Cora, you know that."

"You'd better not! But by the way, have you heard about Rolly Bristed?"

"No, what? I said I had n't read the papers."

"He's embezzled, speculated with the firm's money, and lost it. A cousin of mine who is an intimate friend of Mrs. Rolly's, told me. It's not in the papers yet."

"Though it will be before long if you have anything to say about it! But you don't really tell me Rolly's done a thing like that, really gone to smash in that fashion?"

"Yes, he's absolutely down and out, safe out of the country, as it happens. But the disgrace, think of it!"

"You don't say so! Poor fellow, I am sorry for him. And for his wife, too." Verney spoke with feeling. He knew the popular, likable young broker well. "How'd he happen to get so hard up? I knew he spent a lot, but then I thought he had it to spend."

"Oh, the usual thing!" replied Mrs. Gibbs nonchalantly, "fast women and slow horses!"

Ellis laughed.

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"I guess that's summing up the case a little!" he said. "Poor Rolly!"

Mrs. Gibbs played with her empty glass thoughtfully.

"Yes," she said, "it is sad. One more good sport gone. But for all that, it happens to be the only thing that's new to discuss!"

"Excepting you. You're always new. Let's talk about you."

"I'd like to, but as a subject for conversation I'm nothing to talk about!"

"That's a pity," Verney said, "because I can't think of a better one. You won't let me talk about me, you know," he added whimsically.

That was true. Mrs. Gibbs in the "I'm-older-than-you-little-boy" attitude which she had chosen to assume toward this one of her many admirers — a dangerous attitude, by the way, in spite of the five years' difference in their ages, when indulged in by so fascinating a woman as she was, toward so fascinating a man as Verney Ellis — had long ago forbidden him to talk politics to her. She pretended the subject bored her, and even went so far as to poke fun at Verney's ambitions for political reform, taunting him with having caught the "new blood in politics" fever, as she called it, and refusing to take him seriously at all. And Verney liked it from her, and was glad she didn't talk about his work to him, just as he was glad that Harriet Rand did. It seldom follows that because a man likes a thing

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in one woman he likes it in all the others he knows. So he let Mrs. Gibbs jeer at him and his ambitions to her heart's content.

"Don't go," she said, as the young man after an hour of idle, intimate, delightful talk, reluctantly pleaded the necessity for his departure; "you have n't stayed a moment."

She leaned forward over the table toward him, her bright hazel eyes fixed upon him under their blue-veined lids.

Ellis hesitated, his glance unconsciously returning the fire of hers, but he spoke resolutely.

"I must," he said. "I have an appointment to meet a man at ten o'clock."

"I know who it is.—it's that old Cash Connolly you're always talking so much about!"

Verney laughed.

"How did you know?" he said. For it happened that Mrs. Gibbs's surmise was correct. Cash Connolly, a prominent District leader, was the man he was going to see, for Connolly had promised to talk with him about the possibility of swinging the Eighth District, of which he was supreme dictator, for Ordway, at the coming convention.

In previous talks Verney had been so eloquent in pointing out the advantages that would accrue to the Eighth and to its leader personally, should Ordway be established as the next Governor, that already the shrewd Irishman had committed himself so far as to

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say "almost thou persuadest me," and Verney was hoping great things from the present interview.

"Really," his hostess added, "I'm quite jealous of that man!"

Verney rose. "You need n't be," he said; "you know that as far as mere pleasure is concerned, I'd much rather stay here."

"That's why you go, I suppose," said Mrs. Gibbs; and then, suddenly and impulsively, "don't go — yet. Stay just a moment until — until —" She stopped — they were both standing now, — and brushed a trace of cigarette ash from his sleeve, then let her hand, as if inadvertently, remain on his arm.

Ellis bit his lip hard, but betrayed no disquiet at her touch.

"Until what?" he asked.

"Willie said he was coming back from his banquet early," she said, removing her hand. "I told him if he would bring some one home with him I'd try and keep you for some bridge."

She spoke hesitatingly, her eyes on the floor.

Verney felt that she had not said what she had been going to say. Her plans for his entertainment did not usually include Willie.

"Would n't that be bully!" he said, ironically. "Now, what were you really going to say?"

Cora Gibbs laughed mischievously, a very devil of impudence of a sudden in her eyes. "I was going to say," she said, "don't go until you've told me whether

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you're in love with that Miss Rand from Chicago you were having such a good time with at Antoni's, the other evening."

Verney's face assumed its most reserved expression.

"What if I am?" he said.

"Nothing," she replied; "only I thought if you had really done anything so exciting as to fall in love, you ought to tell me about it! What's the use of being old friends if we don't tell each other things?" She looked up at him with innocent eyes.

Verney sat down again slowly, and Cora, inwardly triumphing that she had kept him — though the means was not to her taste — sat down also.

"What makes you think I'm in love with her?" he asked, beginning to select with much deliberation a cigarette from the box on the table.

"Oh, because you're so cross when I mention her name. Men are always cross when they're in love!"

"Surely some other reason?"

"Yes, besides that, Carol told me that you wrote to each other all the time when Miss Rand was in Chicago."

"Carol!" ejaculated Verney, roused to indignation by this evidence of spying on the part of his younger sister. "What on earth should she know about my affairs? Little fool!"

Mrs. Gibbs screamed with laughter, although it was a very pretty scream.

"There, now, I'm sure of it," she crowed; "or you

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would n't get so angry. Where there's so much smoke, there must be some fire!"

Verney found the particular cigarette he seemed to have been looking for, and put it between his lips, unlighted.

"I'm not in love, just the same," he said, "with Miss Rand," he had difficulty in saying the name, "or any one else. You ought to know that. For the reason that I have told you more than once—that I don't intend ever to marry. And I don't intend to marry because I can't do that and keep in politics too. The demands made upon a man's time if he goes in for public life necessitate his giving up marriage altogether or neglecting his wife—and I'd rather give up marriage."

"Rather than your career? You prefer fame to love?"

"If you want to call something you think you ought to do a 'career,' yes."

"Something you think you ought to do? How do you mean?"

"I mean I think it's a duty to try and improve present day politics which are admittedly in a bad condition, are corrupt and impure, and that if I do what I can to accomplish that object I can be of service to the country." He spoke simply, as if patriotism were the virtue commonest to man, and looked at her as if he expected her to take as a matter of course his having it to such a degree. But she did n't, she could n't begin to understand an ambition so high and disinterested.

Verney Takes the Veil

"Promise you'll come in an hour," said the old nurse, perceiving at once that he was n't to be moved, and backing out of the room.

"All right. In an hour, if I'm not dead then," he agreed, bowing very low with his hand on his heart, and adding as she closed the door, "*Ave! morituri te salutant.*"

But it was two hours before the party broke up. Verney's last conscious act when he finally reached his bed that night was to turn his face away so that he might not see the portrait of Abraham Lincoln, whose sorrowful eyes kept reproaching him from the wall. But he could not so easily escape his guilty conscience; for in turning he found the sardonic eyes of the Emperor Napoleon fixed upon him from the other wall, the left one winking at him with mortifying intelligence.

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There was a pause, then she said musingly,

"It seems very hard, just the same, for a man as young as you are deliberately to plan to give up marrying! Is n't that sacrificing too much?"

She had spoken her true thought before she realized that in urging the Politician to marry she was doing just what she had intended not to do.

"It is hard," said Ellis thoughtfully. "But then," he added more lightly, "if a man will insist on having an ambition he should be willing to sacrifice something for it."

"Even a woman?" she asked, with peculiar significance.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, puzzled by her tone.

"Nothing to be short about, nothing very serious," she replied, settling back in her chair as if in preparation for a long talk and observing with satisfaction that Verney had laid aside his cane and put down his cigarette. "I only meant that if that's the case, if those are really your principles, you should be very careful indeed about your attitude toward women — the unmarried ones I mean!" She laughed.

He smiled too at her distinction in favor of married women, of which he had always been aware, though his mind was too much occupied with trying to understand what she was getting at, to make his amusement more than transitory.

"I'm still in the dark," he said.

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"About not letting them think you mean to marry them," said Mrs. Gibbs.

Verney stared at her a full half-minute; it took that long for him to grasp her idea. Then he laughed derisively.

"How foolish! As if they ever thought any such thing! I give them credit for more sense. The girls I know, at least. As for going around telling myself to be careful or some one will fall in love with me, why that's plain ridiculous. I'm not such a conceited ass, I hope."

"But you should," she said calmly; "you should do just that thing. Every man in the world that's worth looking at has that responsibility to face. If you don't know that, it's time you did. You're not a boy any longer, Verney."

She spoke kindly and very sweetly, with an apparently disinterested friendship that was surprising, unless of course she happened to have reasons of her own for not wishing him to remain longer in ignorance of his responsibility — unless she thought that to open his eyes to it now, would be to check his fondness for Harriet Rand's society before he had gone so far as to fall in love with her. Mrs. Gibbs, it must be understood, did not believe that Verney would be able to keep his resolution not to marry if he should ever really fall in love. But her words made no impression on the young man.

"I don't believe it a minute," he said impatiently, almost disgustingly. "Why have n't I ever heard about

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it before, about this 'responsibility' business, if there's really anything in it?"

"Because, my dear boy, you're unusually lacking in the vanity of your kind," returned his self-appointed instructress. "If you were not, you could n't help seeing it. The more attractive a man is, the greater his responsibility, and you're very attractive, Verney."

He made a gesture of irritation.

"Well, I am not wall-eyed or half-witted, if you mean that," he said, "but I must say I've never thought I had the fatal gift exactly."

"Marvellous! Wonderful!" said Mrs. Gibbs under her breath. "Unique, absolutely unique in my experience of men!" Then aloud, "You ought to be put in a museum, then, as the only living example of a man without any egotism."

"You can make fun all you like," answered Verney, indifferently. "The fact remains that I don't take any stock at all in your extraordinary theory! What did I do with my cane?" He rose to go.

"It's true, though, and you'll understand it some day, I predict. Where are you off to now? To serve your country?"

"To see Connolly, as I told you," he replied shortly, nettled by her mocking manner. "I'm so late now I'll have to work all night, probably, to finish what I've got to do!"

"All right, General Grant!" she said, laughingly, and saluted the young man in pretended homage, "only don't take my head off about it, will you? It *shall*

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serve its country, as much as *ever* it likes. So there now!"

And Verney, realizing at once that it was a waste of time to try to talk seriously of his work to this irritating witch, laughed with her, although he knew it was at himself.

"That's a good boy!" said the witch approvingly. "Don't wait too long before you come again!" and she smiled her brightest at him as they parted.

But when the door had closed behind him her smile vanished, and the brow of the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs grew dark, and her expression very thoughtful. She sat down and leaned her head on her hand.

"He didn't like my asking him if he was in love with the girl!" she said aloud, "and he flushed when he spoke her name." She paused in her meditations, got up and walked restlessly around the room.

"I wonder if Agnes Ordway was right," she said, "I wonder if she was right!"

CHAPTER IX

TEMPTATION

IT was almost six of an afternoon not many days later, and although stenographers and clerks had long ago gone home, Verney was still sitting at his desk in his office in Nassau Street. He had a slip of paper in his hand, and seemed to scrutinize it as if he could not look at it long enough. There was n't much on it, the slip of paper — only a few figures, but it seemed to have the power to give pain; for as he gazed, Ellis's smooth face, which was already pale and weary, grew drawn, and he caught his under lip in his teeth with a cruel grip. Only a few figures stating the young man's liabilities and assets, but they stood for great anxiety and distress of mind; for upon investigating his exact financial standing he was shocked to find how much in excess of the latter the former were.

He had been worrying about his affairs for some time past, but the situation as disclosed to him that afternoon was worse than he had pictured it could be in his most pessimistic moments. His accounts were alarmingly short on the credit side and alarmingly long on the debit side, and the list of outstanding obligation to be met was appalling. He groaned in looking it over for the second time, and smiled a little bitterly,

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for most of the items were mementos of expenses incurred in putting through some reform measure in his district, or in connection with some campaign. The perfectly legitimate expenses incidental to running a political campaign are enormous, and if they were listed for the benefit of any one not familiar with the facts, would hardly seem credible; and Ellis, who never spared expense where a principle was to be upheld, and never let lack of funds prevent him from carrying out any scheme he was interested in, had been in the habit of putting his hand into his own pocket whenever the funds appropriated for the scheme ran low, as they very frequently did.

It was an ambition with him never, if he could help it, to let a good man lose an office for want of financial backing; and whenever a contingency arose which demanded that more money be spent or the battle lost, he spent the money, though it meant going without the luxuries of life, if not the necessities. As his principles would not permit him to take advantage of his chances to graft, and as the time he spent in the pursuit of politics was just so much time taken from the law, so that the income he derived from his practice was very small, the day had come, as he must have seen it would come had he not been too blinded by his enthusiasm for the work his soul loved, when continued indulgence in this reckless policy at last obliged him to face more or less straitened circumstances.

With little or nothing coming in, and all the money

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there was going out, it was hardly surprising that his arrears should eventually have brought him to an abrupt standstill. As he reckoned it, it would take about sixteen thousand dollars to cover his obligations and set him on his feet again. How was he possibly to earn so much money? Why, he could n't do it in a year unless — unless —

The late twilight had set in, and a big moon, chalk-white like the face of a clown, peered in at the young man from between two neighboring skyscrapers where it was neatly sandwiched, but Verney was n't looking at it at all. With a groan he dropped his face in his hands. The rest of his unfinished thought had come to him. He could n't possibly make sixteen thousand a year or anything like it unless he gave up politics and stuck to his practice alone. It would have seemed to any one of his acquaintances a reasonable and simple enough remedy, in fact, the only sensible thing a man in his position could do, but to the Politician it seemed the bitterest pill life had yet asked him to swallow. The generality of the phrase to "give up politics" particularized, meant that he must give up the leadership of his District, and in resigning that, he would be relinquishing his hold on the whole political fabric and would be putting himself out of the running for the chance of holding higher office.

Resign the leadership of his District! The thought was enough to make him groan. His District! His organization which looked to him for the salvation of

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its political soul; the trustful flock under his care, in shepherding which through campaign after campaign he had spent the busiest, most engrossing, most exciting hours of his life! He had worked like a horse for two and a half years, ever since he had completed his term as assemblyman at Albany, and now just as his District was in the best shape it ever had been in, he must leave it, it seemed — abandon it — give into other hands the men he had worked with so long, know their waywardness no longer, their devotion and loyalty no more. And for what a reason! Just for the mere lack of money, just that he might spend his time in the getting together of wretched, inanimate but necessary — ah, how necessary! — silver dollars.

For the same reason, he remembered, he had been obliged to refuse a judgeship a few years ago, because the salary that went with it was not so much as he could make in one year at his practice; and for the same reason he had been obliged to decline to return to the Legislature the year before last. That had been especially hard, for he had loved the life at Albany, and had been very much interested in the part he played in it as assemblyman. The sense of fighting, with great issues at stake on a busy day in the House, appealed to him; when men hurried up and down the aisles, pages ran hither and thither, and overwrought members at different desks besought the attention of the Speaker with vociferous voice and furious gesture; and the Speaker, his friend Ordway, calm-faced, cold-eyed, tapped patiently for order on the little square of marble in the corner of

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his desk. Also he had loved the quiet days when the House seemed to have been in session for months and there was little or nothing to do, and he had plenty of time to lean back from his desk and consider the passing of some new bill he was planning, and the assemblymen around him read newspapers, and the only sound to break the stillness was the voice of the reading-clerk. How much he enjoyed, in those days when he had been running for the office of assemblyman from his district, the excitement of the campaign! How interested in it all his mother and father had been, in spite of their reasons for opposing his going into politics! How eagerly they had followed the course of the campaign! How loyal and devoted, too, had been the butcher and baker and other tradespeople who looked after the welfare of the house of Ellis, how zealous to get their friends to vote for Mr. Verney! And his old nurse, who still lived with the family, and whom Verney had referred to since childhood as "Nanna," how anxious she had been for her favorite's success, how she had cried with joy when he himself brought her news of his election!

Poignant with pain as these reflections were now that he had begun to think they were all memories of the past and that such moments were never to be his again, Verney could not help smiling as he thought of the Scott brothers, who lived on Eighteenth Street, six young men who were great friends of his, and the ease with which he had, every election-time, talked them all into voting the straight Republican ticket, although

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they were all professed Democrats! He laughed aloud as he recalled how on the last occasion of the sort they had rebelled, in spite of the eloquent hours he had spent urging them to vote for the best man, no matter what party he belonged to, and that the best men that particular year were all Republicans — and they had refused to do anything of the sort. They were Democrats, they had said, as their father and grandfather had been before them, and they 'd like to see Verney make 'em vote anything but the straight Democratic ticket! Thus they had sworn to him, and to each other, before they went to vote the morning of election day, but late election night, notwithstanding, each had gone home to the house on Eighteenth Street, removed his shoes before mounting the stairs, for fear of waking his brother, and crept shame-faced to bed; for each one in succession when he had actually come to the point of voting, had found himself somehow or other unable to go against Verney, and rather than offend him, each and all had climbed ingloriously on the band wagon and voted the Republican ticket.

But there were to be no more days like those; his political career was over, the chance to rise — to use a position of power for good — was gone; his great ambition to raise the standard of politics, to clear the reputation of politicians, was out of his power to realize. He groaned again as he thought of it, and the tears — there was no one there to see — started to his eyes and blurred the implacable row of figures on the paper before him and turned each separate one into a

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little dancing devil that shouted at him, "What are you going to do about me?"

For there is unfortunately no premium attached to the career of the honest, uncorrupt, high-minded man in politics. The only reward such public service has to offer is the opportunity for graft and that the man of integrity rejects, which is in itself an explanation of the corruption of present day politics. When public service must mean financial sacrifice few "good men" can afford to go into that kind of life; and the reason unprincipled men can afford to do so is that they go in for what they can get out of it. Here, for instance, was Verney Ellis, a young man whose only motive in entering politics was a patriotic one, to see what good he could do; yet because it was necessary for him to make money in order to live, he was forced to abandon his high ambitions and give up the life he loved. It seemed as if something were very wrong with the whole scheme of things, if it was possible that the lack of money should influence his career more than the country's need for right-minded men in public life; and yet apparently, in this case it was so. What a reproach to the richest country in the world!

Minute after minute passed while Ellis faced with what fortitude he could the terrible necessity of resigning the leadership of his District as the only means of saving the situation financially. If only he could think of another way out of it! Of something else he could do! He couldn't ask his father for the necessary sixteen thousand, considering Mr. Ellis's late

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business reverses; but he would not have stopped at shovelling coal if he might have raised the required sum by that means.

The moon, which had escaped from its trap between the tall buildings and now was showing its jolly clown's face far up in the sky, had begun to look less chalky and to take on a silver tone, filling Nassau Street with its early splendor, before the Politician raised his head from his hands, his problem solved. By the mercy of God, or by the inspiration of the devil, he was n't sure at the time which it was, another way out of his difficulty had been shown him.

"I must marry a rich girl!" he said softly, musingly, as he put away his papers and reached for his hat and gloves; then with sober face and slow step, he left the office and made his way up town.

Earlier that same afternoon, Harriet Rand was sitting in her room at the Holland House, deeply engaged in thought, and the subject of her thoughts was Vernor Ellis and his career — which her confidence in him assured her would land him eventually in the White House. Her aunt had gone out with Mrs. Chittenden, and Miss Rand was waiting for Carol Ellis to arrive, that engaging and vivacious young person having invited Harriet to go with her to a small tea given by Mrs. de Albert, a young married friend of Miss Ellis's.

"It's very informal — so few people are in town," said Carol, who had called for Harriet in due time, as she and her friend got out of the taxicab that had

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brought them to the door of Mrs. de Albert's house in Seventieth Street.

The confusion of laughter and talk in the room where the tea was going on halted for the fraction of a second as the two girls entered, and until the nine or ten women sitting and standing about, who all knew each other more or less intimately, assimilated the fact that the slight, large-eyed girl in dark blue with Carol Ellis was a stranger, and then the chatter flowed on evenly with polite indifference.

Carol introduced Harriet at once to their hostess, a young matron with a high color and a high voice, and Mrs. de Albert introduced them both to Mrs. Harris from California for whom the tea was given. After a few words with this very amiable lady, whose sole mission in life seemed to be to agree with people, and whose staple remark in conversation was "You're so right!" they moved on toward a sofa not far away from the tea-table where two or three attractive girls were sitting. Miss Ellis knew them all and soon made them acquainted with Harriet. Miss Gladys Leverich, who was one of them, Harriet thought particularly attractive. They were very busy talking and laughing while they drank their tea, when Miss Rand felt suddenly that some one was staring at her, and glancing up she encountered the brilliant hazel eyes of Mrs. Willie Gibbs.

Harriet stared back a moment in a casual, uninterested manner, then turned away her gaze. A little later,

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Carol, who had left her friend with Gladys Leverich while she spoke to some one who had just come in, seized upon Miss Rand and began introducing her right and left in her informal, jolly way, and almost before she knew it the girl found herself face to face with Mrs. Gibbs who was, she felt in a subtle, intuitive way, inimical to her.

"Mrs. Gibbs," said Carol introducing them, "do you know Miss Rand?"

"She's very handsome," thought Harriet to herself, a kind of regretful quality in the admission in spite of herself; and "How pretty she is!" thought Cora Gibbs, "much prettier even than I imagined at first."

And then, drawn to each other, in spite of their mutual feeling of distrust, by the knowledge that each was interested in the Politician, they sat down in adjoining chairs and began to talk. After a few minutes' conversation, however, Harriet found that she could not get on at all well with Mrs. Gibbs. She was rather amusing, the young heiress thought, and she said a number of clever things, but they had a doubtful flavor about them. Things Harriet would never have thought of laughing at herself, Mrs. Gibbs apparently seemed to think excruciatingly funny.

"It's a pity you didn't come to New York when the season was on, when there were dances and things," she told Harriet. "Hardly any one is home now. These women you see to-day are here only temporarily, between visits in the country or to do some shopping,

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or something. If I were n't getting ready to go abroad next month I should n't be here myself."

Harriet said she did n't especially care for dances and things. She had been to so many at home, and she supposed they were much the same. New York was interesting to her, in season and out, and it was the best time to shop when there were fewer people in town.

The first portion only of her remarks caught Mrs. Gibbs's attention. "Don't care about dances?" she said; "well, that is strange! But I think you would, and I think you'd find them different, if you went to one in New York. I never will forget one of the Friday evening cotillions that Billy Vandewater led—a very attractive fellow, by the way, you must meet him,—the horse-and-driver figure, particularly!"

"Did it go so well?" enquired Harriet perfunctorily, not a bit interested.

"Go well?" repeated the light-hearted and beautiful Cora Gibbs, laughing delightedly at the very remembrance; "my dear, it was a regular romp! No place for lisle stockings, I assure you!"

Miss Rand, though she could not help getting an immediate and vivid impression of the figure in question from this vigorous and descriptive line, was not in the least amused by it, and made no attempt to reply; she felt justified by its questionable taste in letting her attention wander to the other people in the room. Her averted head, however, did not seem to bother Mrs.

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Gibbs a bit, who continued to prattle happily on as if she had the most interested of auditors.

So it happened that Harriet presently found herself listening without intending it, to a conversation between a woman standing near her, whom she did not know, and Gladys Leverich. She had been hearing what they said without exactly taking it in, when a sentence from Miss Leverich caught her attention. In a momentary pause that seemed to come in the talk all over the room, she heard the New York girl's high sweet tones saying, "Ask Verney Ellis, he told me so himself."

"What did Verney Ellis tell you?" asked Mrs. Gibbs (she also had heard) serenely enough but insistently nevertheless. "Tell us, won't you, Gladys?"

Apparently Miss Leverich's answer to this question was of interest to every woman in the room, for no other conversation was continued.

"Why, he said," replied the young girl, "that if Oliver Ordway were nominated Governor they might nominate him for Attorney-general!"

"Really? How perfectly fine!" came the chorus from every part of the room, and Harriet perceived, and not without a certain pang, that Ellis was very well known to all these women.

"That's nothing new," remarked Mrs. Gibbs carelessly, while Miss Rand realized still more acutely, as the beautiful Mrs. Willie made the remark, that it was not such a distinction to be friend and confidante to Verney Ellis as she had imagined. "It's been talked

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about a long time," continued Mrs. Gibbs; "he told me years ago!"

She rose as she spoke and picked up a magazine from the table and began to glance through it as if the subject no longer interested her. Mrs. de Albert, who knew Cora Gibbs very well, came over to her and laid her hand on the other woman's shoulder.

"Peevish, Cora?" she whispered loudly; "but never mind, you ought to know Verney Ellis by this time! I don't believe there's a woman in New York worth knowing that he has n't confided in at one time or another."

"I'm sure I don't care," returned Cora, wriggling from under her would-be consoler's hand, and continuing to turn the leaves of the magazine.

Mrs. de Albert, who perhaps had not been so anxious to soothe her friend as to amuse herself, went away laughing, to greet a newly arrived guest; and Harriet, who had heard, moved away too, with a sense that she was n't having a good time at all, and a wish that she had not come.

In reality it was nothing out of the way or at all discreditable to him that Ellis should have known all these women well — rather a compliment, on the contrary, for they were all nice and as a group unusually attractive; but to Harriet, who did n't understand his attitude in the matter of having women friends — which, briefly defined, was a feeling that in numbers lay safety — the idea that her hero was everybody's hero came as a revelation that was also something of a blow.

The Struggle at Saratoga

that nine hundred thousand dollars had been spent at that primary contest, and that Peterson had openly stated in advance that he was ready to spend five hundred thousand dollars more to be declared at the primaries the choice for United States Senator. And in New Jersey, too, where the direct primary system was in operation, a great deal of money had been spent.

Could they endorse an administration that approved of a system so bad in its effects, Verney wanted to know. Were they not aware, too, that by the direct nomination system a nomination might be made by a minority, which could not happen in a convention where the choice was always that of the majority of delegates?

Having thus rapidly reviewed some of the reasons for not supporting Downes in any event, which in his estimation were of the greatest importance, Verney went on to score the Governor on his own account. One thing in particular he had never been able to forgive him, and he dwelt at length upon it. It was an act of injustice and bad judgment which provided this young politician with no end of capital in urging the leaders present to offer the nomination to Speaker Ordway.

When one of them, Senator Gray, although they were all on the point of assenting to Verney's proposition, suggested — perhaps by way of proving that he had no greater objection to Ordway — that the Speaker might be too young a man to fill the office of Governor of the State of New York, Verney, who had paused

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— which had the young look that married women often have who have had no children — very thoughtful, “but you see I have so little to occupy my time, and I *must* keep busy about something!” There was a passionate intensity in her tone.

Harriet, who didn’t understand her friend’s loneliness and the reason for it, was wondering what she meant by saying she had to keep busy about something, so long as she had her husband’s career to be interested in, and might perhaps have asked the other to explain, when their conversation was broken in upon by the gay voice of Mrs. Gibbs.

“Don’t stand there and talk, you two, in that dreadfully serious, exclusive fashion,” she said; “I know it’s something terribly intellectual, I can tell by your faces, and we’ve got something *so* exciting to talk about over here!”

Mrs. Ordway and Harriet looked over there and saw that the crowd had thinned out, leaving a small group sitting in a confidential ring around the tea-table.

“What’s your exciting subject, Cora?” Mrs. Ordway said, smiling at Mrs. Gibbs, as she and Harriet joined the group.

“It’s a question,” said Mrs. Gibbs, standing in the middle of the circle of women, her face flushed and mischievous, a cigarette between her first and second fingers. “We’re trying to decide what a woman marries a man for!”

It was the time of day most dear to the woman who

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makes a business of amusing herself, when the stress of the afternoon's gayeties is past and those planned for the evening are still far enough away to permit of a few moments of relaxation before the duty of dressing again presents itself. A delightful sense of peace, of leisure with no immediate necessity of hurrying anywhere for some time yet, pervaded the room. A big yellow lamp stood sentinel by the sparkling tea-table with its dainty freight of liqueur glasses and teacups, and slender forms with comfortably crossed knees leaned gracefully back in the chintz-covered chairs. Voices were low and laughter was frequent, while white fingers made frank excursions to the big silver-rimmed glass bowl on the table where Mrs. de Albert kept her cigarettes.

Harriet had never approved of the habit of smoking for women, and was very glad to see that Mrs. Ordway refused the cigarettes when they were passed to her. It was very lucky that Harriet Rand did not have to depend on her drawing for her living; she was too fond of the conventions to have made a good Bohemian. She was also, however, too wise to criticise where she was not called upon to do so, and too truly kind and generous to be intolerant; so she refused them herself with a smile and did not explain that she never smoked.

"What do you marry a man for?" repeated Mrs. Ordway, "that's easy: So you won't be lonely in your old age!"

She smiled bravely around her as if to defy any one

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to say that if that had been her ambition in marrying, it did not look so far as if it stood much chance of being gratified.

"I don't agree," said Mrs. Gibbs. "Who cares what happens when they're old?" She looked as if she didn't, certainly, with her splendid spirits and warm, brilliant beauty.

"Next?" she said looking questioningly round the circle of laughing faces.

Gladys Leverich rose to the occasion. "To have little thrills run up and down your spine when your eyes meet his," she declared.

A smile went round the ring, and every woman looked at the other, as if to say "We know she's right, but do we dare say so?"

"I don't care, that is the reason!" insisted Gladys, perceiving that her idea was to get no support, and compelled to uphold it herself.

"To have a strong shoulder to cry on!" drawled a sophisticated-looking young person with ironic emphasis.

"Oh, Amy! How can you be so silly?" they all exclaimed, laughing. That idea, as they knew its author intended it to do, seemed most ridiculous of all to this smart, alert, self-reliant group of women, as typically independent as the modern woman can be.

An older woman with good-humored eyes, who had been married a long time and whose talent for listening patiently to other people's troubles made her beloved of

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young women and old, made the next suggestion. "To have children," she said with a vanquished smile that anticipated the storm that followed; for a chorus of protest and expostulation and even derisive laughter greeted her remark.

"The idea!" said every one, and turned hastily to the next reader of the riddle. This was the guest of honor, Mrs. Harris.

"Because no one else has asked you," she said simply, and realizing from the very look of her that she meant it, their laughter rang.

"Or because your mother made you," said a dark-faced young married woman with a habitually discontented expression. This solution was passed quickly by, however. Everybody knew that poor Martha Wotherspoon, who had lately become Mrs. Reid Kennard, had married the man of her mother's choice—who was twice her age but fabulously wealthy—instead of her own choice, a nice young man without a cent.

"Come, come!" said Mrs. Gibbs impatiently looking round at the women who had not yet answered, "this will never do! Every county must be heard from, or we'll never discover the answer! How about it, Connie Wilde? What does a woman marry a man for?"

"For fun!" replied Miss Wilde, who was exceedingly pretty but did not look as if she had a sensible idea in her head.

"To get married!" suggested Mrs. Underhill, a smart-looking young matron who sat next to her;

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“that’s what most women do it for, I think. At least when I look at some husbands that’s the only explanation that occurs to me.” She laughed satirically.

Mrs. Harris rolled appreciative eyes at the speaker. “You’re so right!” she said.

Whereupon Bessie Underhill seemed very much amused — perhaps because she had happened to meet Mr. Harris and had set him down at once for one of the husbands to be explained in that way; for she laughed so hard that she grew almost hysterical and had to have another *crème de menthe* to quiet her.

Harriet could n’t stand it any longer, she thought it was all too silly for anything, and the frivolous treatment of the sacred subject of marriage quite unworthy. She did n’t realize, not knowing these women well, that their frivolity was only the mood of the moment, the result of the irresponsible nature of the hour, and their sense of relaxation; for most of them were in reality women of character.

“I don’t think any one has given the right answer to your question, Mrs. Gibbs,” she said boldly and very gravely. “I think that what you marry a man for is to help him! To do all you can to make him succeed in his work — in his career.”

It was a brave thing to do, to express an opinion that was in the nature of a rebuke in a gathering where she was so little known, but the courage of her convictions was something Harriet did not lack. Amazed silence followed this speech for a moment; then the older woman who had ventured to speak in behalf of the chil-

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dren, said sweetly: "I agree with you, Miss Rand. We *were* getting too silly; but, of course, we all really feel that way about it, too."

A murmur of assent corroborated this statement, and pleasant glances were cast in the direction of the Chicago girl who was not afraid to speak her mind, though her opinion had been cast in such serious mould as to check the spirit of levity in which the others had been giving theirs. They did not altogether relish being rebuked, but they could not help admiring the rebuker for her courage.

There was a general movement to go, and Mrs. Ordway as she rose, by way of restoring to the atmosphere the ease of the moment before, reminded Mrs. Gibbs that she had not yet been heard from on the subject of the afternoon's discussion.

"What do you think we marry a man for, Cora?" she asked.

Mrs. Gibbs put her finger to her brow, as if in deep thought, then threw wide her hands in a gesture of despair.

"I'm sure I don't know!" she said.

A few moments later, as Harriet and Carol, who were among the first to go, were standing on the steps waiting for their cab to arrive, the former heard a swift whisper at her shoulder, and turning, found Mrs. Ordway's face close to hers.

"My dear," said Agnes Ordway very low and hurriedly, "what you said about marrying to help a

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man was quite right, is quite true as a general thing, but not in the case of a man whose work is politics." Her blue eyes sought Harriet's dark ones with a certain intensity of expression. "Don't marry a politician," she repeated warningly, "if you want to help," and swept away to her automobile.

Although Harriet did not understand the warning at the time, or what had prompted it, it was given, as a matter of fact, because Mrs. Ordway had divined that Harriet had had Verney Ellis in mind in saying that the reason a woman married a man was to help him in his career, and that Harriet thought she could help him; and the married woman wanted to save her friend from discovering as she had done in her own case, that she would not be allowed to help. For Mrs. Ordway's own experience had been of the sort to make her feel that, contrary to the custom of the Englishman, who never thinks of excluding his wife from any part of his affairs, in this country the last thing a man wants to do, is to make his wife his confidante in business matters, and that this was especially true if his business happened to be politics. Even if he had the inclination to take her into his confidence, she had come to the conclusion he had n't the time, so tremendous is the activity necessitated by a political career in the United States.

When Miss Rand reached the Holland House that afternoon, which was not until half past six, she found that Verney Ellis had called in her absence. Her

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aunt's voice from an inner apartment apprised her that the card was on the table in their reception room and that Mr. Ellis had only just gone. Harriet picked it up with a feeling of keen disappointment.

"He must have stopped on his way up from the office," she thought. "How too tiresome I missed him!"

CHAPTER X

“WHO KNOWS BUT THE WORLD MAY END
TO-NIGHT?”

THE first of September was on Saturday, and on that afternoon there was to be an open-air horse-show not far from New York, for which Mrs. Ordway had made up a party and invited Harriet Rand. The others who were going were Carol Ellis, Gladys Leverich, Gerald Merrick, and, of course, Verney. The latter had offered to drive them out by coach, the coach in question belonging to a friend of Ellis's for whom he often drove; and Mrs. Ordway was very much pleased with the idea; so it was a great disappointment when the young man telephoned her at the last moment that he would be unable to go after all. It was only two weeks to the convention, and he was very busy, he told her. He was sorry not to have them go out by coach, but if she wished he could get some one else to drive. Mrs. Ordway, too irritated with him to flatter him by explaining that she did n't want any one else, told him that she had changed her plans anyway, and proceeded to take her guests out by motor.

“That's the worst of knowing the boy so well,” she said ruefully; “he thinks he can fail me at the last minute like that, and that it does n't matter a bit!”

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"It does n't," said Harriet serenely. They were in their box at the horse-show. "Oh, look at those bays; I like them far the best!" She called Gerald Merrick's attention to an unusually fine pair of harness horses just passing.

She had been at many such exhibitions, but because of her great love of horses, such shows never lost their charm for her, especially when they were given in the open air. People passing in the promenade nodded and smiled at Mrs. Ordway's party or came in to talk; but although a number of them were known to her, Harriet's interest still was centred in the green-hedged ring with the judges' stand in the middle. She had come to see the horses, not the people. That is not saying that the people were not worth seeing, for it was an unusually smart assemblage, and with the show horses and liveried attendants in the ring, the group of booted and spurred horsemen about the judges' stand, the green-roofed boxes from which the purple and yellow colors of the club floated, made a brilliant picture under the bright September sun.

It was only when Mrs. Gibbs stopped to speak to them, very beautiful in an elaborate costume of lavender shaded by a lavender parasol, with an admirer at each elbow, that Harriet was able to withdraw her gaze from the tourney in front of her, where the flower of equine chivalry in burnished armor of black, brown, and bay, broke lances with each other for the favor of the judges.

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"Hello!" said Cora Gibbs, one lavender shoe on the step of the box, her color deep rose, her eyes warm and lustrous under the shadow of a small bed of pansies which had been cleverly metamorphosed into the form and semblance of a hat, and which graced her head with such exquisite sympathy for the gold of her hair that the artist in every human being that beheld it, whether envious woman or admiring man, bowed down in homage.

"Where's Oliver, Agnes? Could n't he come?" she said, nodding to Harriet, and to the two young men in the box, who had sprung to their feet.

"No," smiled Agnes; "he never comes to things like this, you know; he has n't time."

"And Verney Ellis? I thought you told me he was going to be with you."

"He was," replied Mrs. Ordway as sweetly as before, "only something prevented at the last moment."

"What a bad Verney!" said Mrs. Gibbs, arching her brows significantly at Harriet. "I should speak to him if I were you, Miss Rand."

And before Harriet could decide whether to refute by speech or silence this public imputation that she was directly concerned with the actions of Verney Ellis, Mrs. Gibbs had turned to Mrs. Ordway with a change of subject.

"Are you going to exhibit to-day?"

"Yes, my hunter Tybalt," replied Agnes Ordway, who owned some fine horses, "in the jumping class."

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"That comes next," observed Harriet, consulting her programme.

"And I see the groom walking him about over there beyond those carriages," added Mrs. Ordway. "I think I'll go and see how he is!"

"Let me go with you, Mrs. Ordway, do!" entreated Harriet, who was anxious to see her friend's horse, but more anxious not to be left with Mrs. Gibbs, who had settled down in the box.

They found Tybalt in excellent spirits, but Stephen, the groom, had bad news for his mistress. It seemed the young woman, a professional who was to have ridden the horse, had sprained her ankle in dismounting from another horse and had only just been taken to the club-house.

"She's in too much pain to ride, they say, Mrs. Ordway," said the man.

Mrs. Ordway looked much taken aback.

"How terrible!" she said. "I have n't time to get any one to take Miss Bush's place. We are in the next class, and I *can't* ride myself,—I've never ridden at a horse-show."

"I have," said Harriet, who had made up her mind immediately to help her friend out of her difficulty; "I've done it lots of times at home."

"Can you? Will you?" implored Mrs. Ordway, all hope at the suggestion.

Harriet replied by signalling a carriage standing near.

"We'll just have time," she said, as they got in,

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“to drive to the club and get that habit off Miss Bush before they call our class.”

The carriage raced to the near-by club-house and in an incredibly short time the moaning Miss Bush was divested of a correct and very good-looking habit, and they were back at the ring, Harriet appearing very handsome in her borrowed plumes and not a bit flurried by her haste in donning them.

“Has he any tricks?” she asked Stephen as he took her boot in his hand for the mount.

“Hold him hard when he is coming up and let him have his head when he lands,” replied the man.

And with that, Harriet went on her way to the ring.

“Who’s that?” asked a young man who arrived at the horse-show just as she entered. He touched with his light cane a groom lounging on the rail as he spoke.

“I swear to the Lord if it is n’t Harriet!” next said the late arrival, who was Mr. Verney Ellis, without waiting for the man’s “I don’t know, sir.”

The explanation of the young man’s appearance on the scene at that late hour, after he had definitely told Mrs. Ordway that he was too busy to go, lay in his reason for changing his mind about going in the first place. It was all the result of a revulsion of feeling following his resolution to marry a rich girl as a means of extricating himself from his financial difficulties without abandoning his beloved politics. On the impulse of the moment, spurred on by that dark hour in his office, he had called on Harriet with the vaguely

“How Goes the Fight?”

continued to live with the Ellises, beloved and respected by everybody in the house.

This had been arranged to please Verney, who, as a little boy when he was first taken from his nurse's charge and sent to school, petitioned that Nanna never be allowed to go away; but as time went on Mrs. Ellis found it a practical arrangement as well, as the old woman up to her last illness was active and able and was always finding some new way to make herself useful. Her chief care, nevertheless, continued to be for Verney, whom she had never been able to consider grown up; and the other servants in the house soon realized, and invariably warned newcomers that this was the case; that in regard to any neglect of “Mr. Verney's” interests old Nanna had to be reckoned with.

He was her child, her more than son, her idol, her very all; and now that she felt her end was close upon her, the one thing she asked of life was to see once more the beloved face, to hear again the familiar young voice asking “Where's Nanna?” the minute he was in the house. She could go weeks without seeing him, content with tidying his room, mending his clothes, making some little trifle for him to wear—she was an accomplished knitter,—but the day that brought her a glimpse of him was a red-letter day for her, and when he was pleased to laugh and joke with her, as he often did when he had a minute to spare, no girl receiving her first compliment could have been more pleased.

“Is he coming?” she asked for the hundredth time

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from the bed where she lay exhausted and wasted by her short fierce struggle with the dread disease from which she was suffering and which she realized was on the point of being victorious. "Surely he must be coming now, Miss Carol?" She had been asking that question all that day and the preceding one in her delirium, and now that her head had become clear, late that afternoon, she was asking it still.

This interval of reason, however, far from being a good sign, the doctor had told the watchers by the bed was a sure precursor of death.

"No, Nanna, not yet!" poor Carol who was sitting beside the bed, her nose red, her eyes swollen — all the family were devoted to Nanna — had been forced to reply; and she went to the window to see if a cab were turning up the block.

"I wish the young man could be hurried," said the trained nurse from the other side of the bed, a typically calm, unimaginative young person in white linen, with the air common to her kind, of expecting to get at once anything she might ask for, "this anxiety is bad for the patient."

The old woman in the bed spoke again, but this time less plaintively and what was more pathetic, with confidence.

"I know he'll come," she said, "when he knows his old Nanna is going to leave him! Verney! Verney! Nanna wants you, dear!"

The young girl in the window rose softly and left the room that the "patient" might not see her tears.

“How Goes the Fight?”

“Oh, why does n't he come?” she said to her mother outside on the landing (Mrs. Ellis had come to enquire how the sufferer was); “it's the cruellest thing I ever heard of, to keep her calling for him like that just for the sake of his old politics! If he does n't come in time — if Nanna dies — ” she broke down altogether and sobbed aloud.

The doctor, who had not long been gone, hurried by them at this moment and entered the room, and through the opened door they heard the old woman singing “Lead, Kindly Light.” Nanna had been well educated and a devoted church-goer.

“The night is dark, and I am far from home!” came the weak voice of the dying woman in the room, reinforced by the stronger one of Miss Hallie, the nurse. With the last verse, however, —

“And with the morn those angel faces smile
Which I have loved long since, and lost a while,”

sung brokenly and with touching expression, Miss Hallie joined the group in the hall, an unwonted emotion in her cold young face.

“She's getting delirious again,” she told them, resolutely applying her handkerchief to her eyes.

Mrs. Ellis entered the room, and on hearing the door open Nanna raised herself suddenly in her bed. “I knew you'd come!” she said, “My baby! My little Verney!”

But the light of reason was no longer in her eyes. It was ten o'clock that evening before Ellis reached

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New York. He had telegraphed from the train when he expected to arrive, but no one came to meet him as he had hoped, to give him the news, and he ran up the steps of his home with foreboding in his heart.

His sister Carol, who had been watching for him, opened the door.

"Is she — is she — ? —" began Verney, his charmingly enunciative voice broken and breathless with haste and anxiety.

"She died an hour ago, calling for you," replied Carol, who was yet too unreconciled to his tardy arrival to wish to spare him anything.

His Uncle Richmond, who had gone down to the train after all to break the news of his old nurse's death to Verney, but had in some way missed him at the station, came in at this moment. He had been at his sister's all the afternoon and evening, feeling that his presence was a comfort to her and to Carol in this sad crisis, and had felt the pathos of the dead woman's situation not a little; but at sight of his nephew he could not suppress his eagerness to hear how the day had gone for him at Saratoga.

News of the Governor's defeat and Ordway's nomination had already appeared in the papers, but not the nominations for the minor offices which had been made later.

"Well, friend, how goes the fight?" he said.

"She's dead," replied the Politician, who stood in the hall with bent head. "I got here too late. I hurried all I knew, but it was too late."

“How Goes the Fight?”

“I meant the outcome of the Convention, dear boy,” said his uncle gently placing a kind hand on the drooping shoulders, “did you get the nomination for Attorney-general?”

“I don’t know,” said Verney.

“Here’s a telegram for you,” said Carol, picking one up from the hat-rack, “it came just before you did, and I forgot about it until now.”

“You open it, Uncle Ritchie,” said Ellis to Mr. Vernor, turning away his head as he spoke. He was sick of telegrams.

The older man obeyed, and reading it, a smile lit up his face and he handed it triumphantly to his nephew.

It was from Ordway, announcing Verney’s nomination as Republican candidate for Attorney-general.

CHAPTER XIV

RIVALS

THE first news that Harriet had of Verney's nomination was when she read it in the papers at the breakfast table the next morning. With pulse and heart-beats a trifle accelerated she eagerly scanned the list of nominations made in the convention.

"For Governor," she read, "Oliver Ordway,"

"For Lieutenant-governor, Morris Gray,"

"For Secretary of State, Samuel S. Kerning,"

"For Attorney-general, James Vernor Ellis,"

and read no further.

But though she was unable to keep from rejoicing that this good fortune had befallen Verney, she could not on the other hand help wishing she had learned the news from him. He might so easily have telegraphed. She felt certain, however, that he would call, that whatever reason he imagined he had had for ignoring her heretofore would be forgotten in this important crisis, and that he would come at once to receive her congratulations. Expecting him momentarily then, when he did appear — which was not for three days — her enthusiasm had vanished and the warmth had departed from her welcome. His tardiness in sharing his good news with her hurt her more than anything

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he had yet done. She was convinced by it that his dependence upon her for sympathy in his political hopes and ambitions had been a mockery, his confiding his plans to her nothing more flattering than the whim of a moment. She had his utter disregard of her at this important moment of his career as proof of his insincerity.

Verney meanwhile had been making a hard struggle against his inclination to do just what Harriet expected him to do — call and tell her all about it. Tired from his three days of mental and physical activity at the Convention, worn out from the strain he had been under there and the sleep he had lost, and melancholy and dispirited as a consequence of his old nurse's death and the pathetic circumstances under which she had died, for which he felt more or less to blame, the only thing Verney felt he really wanted to do was to go and see Harriet. No wonder, then, that his recent determination to give up his friendship with her, celebrated with so much pomp on the occasion of the ceremony of taking the veil, wavered, and that the third day of temptation found it abandoned and Ellis on his way to Forty-ninth Street. From which it is to be judged that Verney was no better at keeping good resolutions than any one else, although to do him justice, he would have kept this one if he had thought for a moment that it had anything to do with any one but himself. But he did n't. He thought, on the contrary, that his conviction that a man in his circumstances should not marry, and the resolution to put love out of his life

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which he had made on the strength of it, was his affair alone, affected him only, and that he was less guilty in breaking that resolution than if it had affected any one else.

As he swung off the Madison Avenue car at Fortyninth Street and walked east toward the house Mrs. Cumloch was now occupying, he found himself happier than he had been for some time, and it was with a warm sense of pleasure to come that he felt in his pocket for the small white campaign button, printed in black with the legend "For Governor, Oliver Ordway" which he had saved as a souvenir from the State Convention to give to Miss Rand.

His pleasant anticipations were dispelled however when he found that Harriet had already four callers that Sunday afternoon. He was terribly disappointed; he had not dreamed that she would not be alone; and then, Harriet herself was not any too delighted to see him, was in fact horribly cold and distant. With a forced manner quite different from his usual friendly, pleasant one he spoke to the other men in the room, Gerald Merrick, his Uncle Richmond, Robin Hill, and Billy Vandewater. The stress and strain of the last few days had been too real, had pulled him down too much, to admit of a better simulation of an enthusiasm he did not feel.

"Hail the conquering hero!" said Billy Vandewater, banteringly as the newcomer found a seat on the outer rim of the circle about Harriet, and Verney, who had forgotten it for the moment in his general feel-

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ing of weariness and depression, remembered quickly that he hated Billy Vandewater.

A chorus of congratulation and question followed, more or less sincere — for Verney was a favorite — but was construed by its perverse object as perfunctory and dismissed by him as briefly as possible. Harriet, he noticed with bitterness, had been markedly behind the others in congratulating him upon his nomination, and had hardly done anything except fiddle with the tea things since he had made his appearance. He began to wish he had n't come. Why should she fail him now, just when he was most in need of sympathy? What had he done to displease her? Had n't he the best reason in the world for keeping away from her and was n't he here at the cost of breaking his resolution? Had n't he written her a letter from Saratoga? What more did she want? But in thus justifying himself to himself he had overlooked the highly important fact that Harriet was ignorant of the nature of his "best reason in the world for keeping away," utterly in the dark as to his motives for behaving as he had done.

Absorbed in these unprofitable reflections, it took him some time to notice that he was being left entirely out of the conversation and that Harriet was leading it with a brilliancy and light-heartedness, not to say ability for ignoring him, that amazed Verney, accustomed as he was to the first claim upon her attention. Yet Harriet was not showing a petty resentment in her indifference to his presence. He was too obsessed by his

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own side of the question, too occupied with his work to realize it, but he had nevertheless given her just cause for feeling hurt; and one letter from Saratoga quite devoid as it was of apology or explanation of his inexplicable change of attitude toward her, had not sufficed to banish that feeling. With all the will in the world she found she could not feel the same toward him: and try as she would, her efforts to talk to him as naturally as of old were failures. And Verney, appreciating this, fell a prey to the deepest gloom and in the most approved Death's-Head-at-the-Feast style, sat silent with folded arms in the midst of the laughter and talk.

"Are n't you going to have anything to eat?" Harriet said at last when his silence had lasted a long while, with a fair imitation of her old sweet smile, her black eyes glooming at him from behind the tea-urn.

He started as if awakened from a bad dream, and looking up quickly, saw that his uncle and the other two men had gone and that only Billy Vandewater was left besides himself. The realization gave him new life and energy, and he made up his mind in a flash to sit the other out and have Harriet all to himself, when he hoped they might come to a better understanding. For he saw that he had hurt her, and whether he understood how he had done so or not, it troubled him.

He drew up his chair nearer to the girl's. "Yes, indeed I am," he replied, "everything you have. I'm hungry!" He smiled brilliantly and the color rose in his pale face.

Harriet, who had observed his pallor and despondent

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air with secret concern, for all she had felt so unable to show it, was greatly cheered by this return of his old spirits and almost made up her mind to forgive his recent unkindness then and there.

"Those soft chocolatey things are the best," she said, taking a plate from the table and offering it to the young man.

Vandewater thought it time for him to "come in."

Making an excuse of his failure to reach the Sheffield tray with his empty cup from where he sat, he moved his chair up on the other side of Harriet's, a trifle nearer perhaps than Verney had moved his.

"How 's politics?" he asked, thinking it advisable to address Ellis in friendly fashion, at least as a starter.

"Fine, thanks," returned Ellis pleasantly. "How 's leading cotillions?"

Verney's reference was satirical, as the accomplishment was the one ostensible occupation Vandewater was known to have in life. Although he had been admitted to the bar he did not practise, for a fortune inherited directly afterwards had placed him beyond the need of doing so.

"Have some more tea, Mr. Vandewater?" interposed Harriet hastily, scenting the battle afar off.

" "There is n't any more," said Alice," volunteered Verney quoting glibly from Lewis Carroll, and he tipped the tea-pot as he spoke to prove the truth of his words.

"I 'll get it filled," Harriet said laughing, his manner was so absurd; "just ring that bell over there will you, Verney?"

"Don't trouble, Miss Rand, I did n't want any more,"

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Vandewater said stiffly, at last able to swallow the resentment which Verney's remark had aroused, and which the discovery that he and Harriet called each other by their first names had not tended to appease.

Harriet did not, however, entirely restore Verney to her good graces that afternoon. She tried to, but the hurt was too deep to make such a rapid healing anything but superficial. Something was evidently very much amiss, seriously wrong.

Verney observed with concern that she was natural with him only by fits and starts and that she seemed much more at ease with Vandewater, turning to him more frequently and seeming more anxious to hear what he had to say on the various subjects of conversation that were brought up. A horrible feeling that he was making a mistake in supposing that she would want to talk to him alone came over him, as he saw how gladly and how often she appealed to the other man, and he began to think she would prefer to have Vandewater the last caller to take his leave. She might even be in love with the fellow, for all he knew! There had been plenty of time for that phenomenon to have occurred, his exaggerated state of apprehension told him, during the two weeks in which he had seen nothing of her himself; and which the rich and idle Mr. Vandewater had probably put to good advantage.

The thought almost compelled him to take his departure at once, but his reluctance, which by this time seemed inborn in him, to leave the other man victor of any field upon which they had both entered, kept him

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where he was. If it had been any other than Billy Vandewater, if other people had been there, he would not have hesitated; but the bare idea of seeming to retire beaten under the eyes of this extremely distasteful person made his gorge rise and glued him to his chair. He would sit Vandewater out at any cost. Unfortunately for the success of this plan Miss Rand's other caller had hit upon the same scheme, had made up his mind about the same time to sit his rival out; and as with him a determination amounted to obstinacy, it seemed quite likely the call would never terminate, and that the three would sit there all night.

It was the girl herself who finally put an end to the situation. Rising with the sweetest kind of dignity, she gave each young man in turn her hand in token of dismissal and explained very gently but decidedly that she was very sorry she couldn't ask them to dinner but she was dining out herself and it was time to dress. She was sure they did n't know how late it was.

Verney was the first to reach the street. Mortified that he had allowed his feeling of antagonism for Vandewater to lead him into showing a lack of consideration for Harriet, convinced that he had displeased her by his conduct that afternoon, and half angry with her as well for having rebuked them — for though accomplished with exquisite tact the dismissal had been in the nature of a rebuke — this unreasonable young man with the boyish quickness of temper came at once to the conclusion that it would be a matter of necessity as well as expediency on his part to forgo her society in the future.

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"Here," he said, stopping a small boy of the street urchin variety who was sauntering by, "don't you want a souvenir from the Saratoga convention?" He fished out the white tin button from his pocket as he spoke with "For Governor, Oliver Ordway," on it which he had been too disgusted with the result of his call to offer to Harriet.

"Sure," said the small boy who made it a rule to take anything that was offered him and who always wanted everything, halting expectantly.

He showed more enthusiasm, however, and less matter-of-fact acquiescence when he actually saw what it was the "swell" wanted to give him, and as Verney explained its significance his eyes snapped with delight. Here was a trophy indeed to display before the other "kids," a campaign button from the scene of battle with the name of the victorious Republican candidate for Governor on it!

"Dontcher want it yourself?" he asked, gazing amazedly up into the young man's face as Verney pinned it carefully on the ragged lapel of his little jacket.

"No," said the Politician, "not any more. I was going to give it to my girl, but she's gone back on me!"

He had hardly released the boy whose impatience to go and "show the other kids" had made the process of pinning on a lengthy one, when Vandewater caught up with him.

"Going my way?" asked Verney, casual but polite.

"No, I'm not," said the other, "I just wanted a match, if you have one."

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"Certainly," said Verney, offering a box of safeties.

"Thanks," said Vandewater lighting his cigarette carefully and returning the box. Then, just as he turned away, "Oh, by the by, Ellis, perhaps you'll be interested in something I've just decided to do?"

"Perhaps," returned Verney lightly, pausing to hear what the other had to say.

"I'm going to run for Attorney-general on the Democratic ticket," said Vandewater.

CHAPTER XV

THE ONE THING A WOMAN MUST NOT SAY

ALMOST a month had passed since the open-air horse-show, but the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs had not as yet forgotten that on the occasion of the club dance in the evening Verney Ellis had not danced with her and had danced with Miss Rand. The very recollection of their utter absorption in each other as they danced, and their indifference to her presence as she watched them from the door, made her wince and writhe and set her hazel eyes to sparkling. For the plain truth and the ugly truth was that the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs was jealous of the young heiress from the West. She would not have admitted it herself, however, but would have characterized her feeling as a perfectly just resentment of Harriet's apparent appropriation of her property, and during the weeks that followed the dance where such a marked instance of that appropriation had taken place, she thought of nothing but how she might weaken the girl's influence—turn Verney's mind from all thought of her. Interference was really necessary; if something was n't done in a hurry, she almost feared he might marry Miss Rand! And then what would become of his career? and incidentally—though this reason Mrs. Gibbs was careful to keep in the background

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of her mind,— what was to become of her little flirtation with the young man?

The bare idea of such a traitorous act on Verney's part as getting married set his self-appointed guardian and supposed friend to plotting to see what spoke could be applied to this threatening wheel. It should be applied with a skilful hand, of course, and if possible was to be the smallest, most microscopic of spokes — a mere hint or suggestion — but applied it must be. Of that she was convinced. Did any one have the right to deprive her of the thing that most amused and interested her in life, her friendship with Verney Ellis? She thought not.

The first thing to be done toward accomplishing her purpose was to get hold of the young man himself, but for some reason this seemed very difficult to do. Except for a brief word at a dinner-party one evening she had not had speech with him since the day of the horse-show. She had written him her prettiest notes proposing luncheon down town and quiet dinners with "Willie away," and had telephoned him till she was ashamed to do it again, but Verney had declined all invitations to go and chatter with his charming friend. He was "busy" he said, in answer to them all, invariably that and nothing more.

And this was only the truth. He *was* busy. Vandewater with all the money he wanted to back him, and some friends with political influence, had had no difficulty in getting himself nominated for Attorney-general at the Democratic Convention, held not many days after

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the one at Saratoga. The campaign for Governor, with the other offices included in the Republican and Democratic tickets, had been begun with a rush, for it was late in starting that year like the national campaign and had to be a short one; and with his friend Ordway's interests to work for as well as his own, Verney felt he had his hands too full for idling.

Chance favored Mrs. Gibbs, however, when everything else had failed, and returning from down-town one morning in her brougham, she saw the graceful, erect form of the Politician walking down the avenue. In a second she had signalled her coachman to draw in to the curb and Verney, halted by a violently waved handkerchief, perceived that he was run to earth. With his sweetest smile, therefore, in token of surrender he stepped into the carriage beside her.

"Let's go somewhere for luncheon!" said the fair pirate of the high avenue.

"Anywhere, everywhere, I will follow on!" replied Verney in hymnal paraphrase. Having been fairly caught, he was resolved to be an amiable prisoner, and then he never attempted to deny that he was fond of Cora Keator Gibbs and of talking to her, or rather of listening to her talk.

"Sherry's," said Mrs. Gibbs to the coachman.

Verney glanced covertly at his watch. He had a pressing engagement at the Republican headquarters at two o'clock, for having devoted himself conscientiously to his law business all that morning he felt at liberty to do a little work on the campaign. It was then twelve

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— just time enough to lunch with a woman. Though it often took more than two hours he had never been able to do it in less. With Cora Gibbs, fortunately, he could reduce the time to its minimum. That was the advantage of knowing her so well. They were early enough to get a table in the corner and by the window, the two essentials to thorough enjoyment of a luncheon *tête-à-tête*, and Verney sat down with a feeling that it was n't half bad to eat in Christian fashion again. He generally had a sandwich and something to drink in the middle of the day, or if more than usually pressed for time, only something to drink, and sometimes neither.

Perhaps it was a good thing, after all, to have leisure forced upon you if you did n't ever feel like taking it yourself.

"Let's have melons first," he said; "you can't have them much later than September."

"Yes," agreed Mrs. Gibbs, raising her veil and removing her gloves.

"And let me see,— how would a frightened egg do after that?"

She laughed. "I don't know what that is," she said.

"Yes, you do. The way they cook eggs here —" He looked at the waiter for assistance, who said he knew what the gentleman meant and would bring it.

"You don't seem to think this is my luncheon!" Mrs. Gibbs reminded him, when they had finished ordering and the waiter had departed.

"I don't," said Verney smiling, "because you know and I know that it's mine and under no circumstances

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could it be yours!" He might have added with truth: "Also that you can afford to pay the ten dollars it's going to cost, and I can't," if the truth on such matters were ever spoken.

"Why did n't you come and let me congratulate you on your nomination?" she asked him, leaning both elbows on the table, and looking at him a little reproachfully.

"I could not find the time, Cora. I swear to the Lord I could n't!" he assured her earnestly; "I've been too awfully rushed."

"I know and I understand," she replied soothingly. It was n't her plan to scold him; she wanted him to be in the best of humors when it came time to hurl her bolt. "I would n't have wanted you to come if it meant slighting your work, you know that."

"I do," he said gratefully; "you always understand everything. I don't have to be forever thinking what I'm saying and doing for fear of offending you, as I have to with most women."

"Careful, Verney, careful!" she admonished playfully. "You'll have to do lots better than that if we are to remain friends,—only friends!" Her laugh rang, but her eyes were tender.

"Why? I don't have to feel 'responsible' when I'm with you, do I? You're not going to apply your preposterous theory to us, are you?"

She saw that she had taken the wrong tack and reassured him hastily. "I should think you did n't!

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What! with your sister Cora? Years and years older than you?"

It was Verney's cue to deny, and he always took it with enthusiasm.

"Younger, you mean," he said. "I give you my word, I never saw anything younger than you are to-day!" he gazed appreciatively at her brilliant color, her dazzling hair, and sparkling eyes, which formed such bright contrast to her severely plain suit of dark blue.

"There you go again," she remonstrated, "but it's no use; I have a stiff neck — caught cold in it yesterday — and my head won't turn!"

"Can't I say nice things, then, when I think them?"

"All you want, on the contrary," she replied with emphasis. "I've an ostrich's digestion for nice things!"

The time went very pleasantly for Verney, and Mrs. Gibbs, with whom it was a conviction that to make a man laugh was to render him half won and to make him think he could make her laugh was to render him all hers, had kept him so charmed first with her and then with himself, that he was very nearly in a good enough humor, she thought, to be approached on the subject of his folly in paying serious attention to Harriet Rand.

"Have you heard Stevie Cass's latest?" she asked, as they began their fruit salad.

"No; what's the bright boy been saying now?" asked Verney, smiling in anticipation of something good. Cass was quite the professional wag.

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"It was apropos of Roberta Caldee's breaking her engagement to Nate Bronson because she discovered he'd been engaged before," Mrs. Gibbs began with relish. "It's awfully sacrilegious, but Stevie said,"—she interrupted herself to laugh—"that the first commandment according to Roberta, was 'Thou shalt have no other girls before me!'"

Verney nodded approvingly. "That's one of his best," he said.

"You've heard it before! You know it!" accused Cora.

"No, I know Stevie!" Ellis replied.

"And he told you himself?"

"Yes, I saw him last night. He never likes to have his friends miss his good things, you know."

"Poor Stevie! He ought to be in a better business than making jokes! He has too little money to spend to be idle."

"Especially when he has so many girls! Never saw such a fellow for girls! If he sends flowers to them all, it must break him!"

"He does, but it does n't break him, because he sends all the bills to his father! But tell me, Verney, speaking of girls, have n't you a new one yourself? Billy Vandewater was saying only the other day that you were seriously interested in your friend from Chicago!"

"We have talked about that before," said Verney, with deep displeasure. The quotation from Vandewater and the expression "your friend" were equally distasteful to him.

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Mrs. Gibbs saw that her approach-shot, so to speak, had not landed on the green, and she dropped her light tone immediately and spoke pleadingly, leaning toward him with earnest eyes.

"Don't be cross," she said. "I don't want to talk about it because I want to pry into your affairs or gossip, but only because I'm interested in you, and I don't want you to do anything I should consider foolish without trying to stop you!"

"And what would you consider foolish?" he asked, somewhat softened by her apparent sincerity and anxiety for his welfare.

"Marrying," she said.

Verney looked out of the window. "I told you what I was going to do about that the other week. I told you I did n't intend to marry, and why."

"Yes, you did, and I approved of your resolution. But what I'm afraid of is, that if you really permit yourself to fall in love, you'll break your resolution. It's easy enough to stick to it while there's no temptation to face, but —"

"But when there is, you think I won't be able to withstand it? You have n't a very high opinion of my will power!" he interrupted.

"It is n't that, only I can't help feeling anxious."

"Why? What is it to you?" He was beginning to wonder that she should show quite such concern.

"Oh, Verney! I should be so disappointed, so sorry! I could n't bear to see you give up your career, your ambitions, at your age."

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"I think it would be a pity myself, if I did."

"Such a pity! And I'm awfully afraid you're going to do it! I've some very good intuitions where my friends are concerned, and I seem to feel, I seem to feel—" her tone was that of a seer—"that you're on the point of committing yourself to Miss Rand!" She did feel that way, but it was her jealousy, not her intuition, that told her so. If she had only understood the situation a little better, if her clairvoyance had only been able to inform her of the true state of the case, that far from being on the point of committing himself to Miss Rand, Verney had only lately taken a positive resolution never even to call upon her again—how much trouble the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs would have saved herself! "And I'm so proud of you, Verney, you know!" she went on, murmuringly. "I hate to see you throw yourself away so young. No man with so brilliant a prospect before him as you have"—the emphasis on the "you" was most flattering, and Ellis was not insensible to it—"can afford to tie himself up in that way. Not until he's *years* older!"

"I agree with you perfectly," said the young man. "There's no doubt in the world in my mind that marriage now would interfere with my work. Unless, of course I were such a brute as not to let it interfere!" He paused. "So you see it looks as if I would have to remain a bachelor."

"Because you're not a brute?"

"Just that. So you see you're worrying yourself unnecessarily."

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"Oh, do you think so?" she cried gladly. "Can you really assure me of that? I'm so pleased, so relieved!" Then rapidly, impulsively, "I've planned such great things for you, you know. I expect you to go so far! Quite as far as the White House!" She smiled very engagingly at him.

He smiled too. The White House was not an ambition of his, but he felt she said it to prove her devotion to him and her faith in his success, and did not gainsay her.

"Pretty nearly time to go," he said. "I know it's rude to look at my watch like this, but that's what you get for lunching with a man with political engagements to keep."

But Mrs. Gibbs did not rise. She was not ready to go yet, she had one more question to ask the young man. She had not heard Verney deny his devotion to Harriet Rand quite as explicitly as she wished him to. The general statement that he was not going to marry did not altogether satisfy her hunger to hear that he was, as he had always been, or as she thought he had always been — hers and hers only.

"You are n't interested in her, then? Billy Vandewater was mistaken?" she said — the knowledge that she was doing a foolish thing, that she was in danger of losing all the effect of her previous diplomacy by this bald, point-blank question, lending a peculiarly breathless quality to her voice.

Verney looked at her in some surprise. "I did n't say that," he asserted; "I could n't, because I happen

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to think a great deal of Miss Rand, if that's whom you are talking about."

"You mean you're in love with her?" asked Mrs. Gibbs, carried on to her fate by a resistless tide of jealousy that swept away every other consideration whether of propriety or diplomacy. Her insatiable curiosity to know the worst rendered her indifferent to the risk she ran that Verney would discover her true motive for advising him against marriage, that it had been her own selfish desire to retain her hold upon him, and not solely an interest in his welfare. And this in spite of the fact that she knew, as a woman of her intelligence could not help knowing, that such a discovery on his part would be as mortal a blow to their friendship as his marriage could possibly be.

"You mean you're in love with her?" she repeated while Verney hesitated.

"I hardly know," he said. He was certain he was not in love with Harriet, but he was not certain he was n't very near it. At any rate he did not propose to discuss the pros and cons of the matter with Cora Gibbs.

"That means you are! Oh, Verney! Verney!" wailed Cora Gibbs, concluding the worst from this non-committal statement; and then with a masterly effort to regain her impersonal interested-friend manner, "I'm so disappointed! What will become of your career?"

Her persistent interference in his affairs angered Verney.

"What's Miss Rand got to do with my career?" he asked fiercely. "I would be obliged if you would leave

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her out of the discussion. Besides," he added less sternly, "as I've told you before, I don't intend to marry, so what difference does it make whether I'm in love or not?"

But that was just where Mrs. Gibbs disagreed with him. She thought it made all the difference in the world, so much, indeed, that if he was in love — and she had about made up her mind by this time that he was — she was convinced, as she had confessed to him she was, that no amount of resolutions by themselves would serve to keep him from marrying.

There was only one recourse at her command that she could think of with which to try to avert this terrible catastrophe. If tears and entreaties and a confession of her feeling for him could keep Verney single he should not be lost for want of them. In her determination not to be beaten, not to allow the young man to escape from under her influence, she did not recognize this as the argument of despair and the same disastrous policy which her cooler common sense had rejected a moment ago. Truly she was being carried on to her fate by a resistless tide. She cast a glance in the mirror as they left the room and saw with satisfaction that she was looking her very best, for her very best as she knew well, would be a compelling factor in the success of her next move.

"Get in and let me drop you where you want to go," said she, as her brougham drew up at the curb outside.

Verney hesitated. He had begun to feel that he was being coerced; from what motive he didn't quite

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gather, but the feeling was a definite one. It was also likely to be fatal to Mrs. Gibbs's plan, since there is nothing so unmanageable as a young man who begins to get the idea that he is being "managed." But in spite of this apprehension Ellis decided to accept Mrs. Gibbs's offer after all. The probabilities were that she had not meant to be domineering or anything more than friendly, in taking such an interest in his affairs, and anyway he was late for his appointment.

"Thanks," he said, getting in after her.

"Verney," Mrs. Gibbs said solemnly when they had gone a few blocks in the direction Verney had wished to go, which fortunately for her schemes, led through quiet and deserted streets. "Do you really know why I was so anxious for fear you were going to marry that girl?"

"Yes," he replied, looking at her in astonishment and not liking the "that girl" at all, "you thought it would be an unwise thing to do if I were going to succeed in politics, was n't that it?"

"No," she said softly, and he realized suddenly how near she was; "I was anxious only on my own account, not yours, because I did n't want to have our friendship broken up, because I did n't want to lose you, because I'm fond of you myself!"

"Don't go and get married, Verney dear," she hurried on before he could interrupt. "Don't go and spoil everything. We've had such good times together, and we can have so many more if only you will be sensible and not tie yourself down to a hearthstone! And I can

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help you, advise you in the difficult path to success you've cut out for yourself, ever so much better than any little fool of a girl who knows nothing at all. You know I can!" Her flushed face and pleading, shining eyes lent her an almost supernatural loveliness.

"Ah, Verney, Verney!" she cried in answer to his look of utter amazement and incredulity, "don't you understand? It's just that I can't give you up, I can't let you belong to any one else! I can't, indeed, I can't!"

He felt her arms go about his neck and a soft, exquisite cheek pressed against his chin.

"If you do," she murmured in his ear, "if you do go and marry some one else and never come to see me any more" — with a half-hysterical sob — "I shall die!"

It was a rude shock to the Politician. Until now he had relied upon the clever and beautiful Mrs. Gibbs for common sense before everything else, had taken for granted that she understood as well as he did himself the irresponsible nature of the affair between them, especially as it was founded upon a lifelong intimacy.

Yet here she was hysterical in his arms like any ordinary woman, reiterating the astonishing confession that she was in love with him — that is, if his stunned faculties permitted him correctly to grasp the situation. It was incredible to the point of being ridiculous, and he could hardly recognize unemotional, calm, brilliant Cora Gibbs, his friend and comrade of so many evenings, pleasantly spiced with flirtation as they had been — his admiration for whom he had never made any attempt to

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hide — in this sobbing, demoralized creature that clasped his neck so wildly.

Very gently but decidedly he removed her clinging fingers, forcing her to sit upright. "I'm sorry, Cora," he said gravely. "I had n't the least idea of this — that you felt that way." And by the very tone of his voice she saw that it was all over, that her trump card had met with disastrous and overwhelming defeat.

In the shock of this rebuff as they sat and stared at each other she realized that she had made a mistake and an irretrievable one, that she had said the one thing a woman who has not been asked to say it must never say to a man, if she does n't want to lose him at once and forever. She had told him, or intimated at least, that she cared for him, and far from binding him more firmly to her, the intelligence had put an end to the intimacy as summarily as a scissors severs a taut string. It was n't true, of course; she did n't really love him in the sense that she wished to marry him, for she was married already and happened to love her husband; but her vanity had not been able to suffer the thought that another woman should deprive her of this young man's society, upon which she depended for most of the amusement she got out of life, and had compelled her to try to keep him hers at any cost. But in telling him as a means to this end that she loved him, she had overreached herself; for having said it, she could not go back on it — a confession of love being the one thing a woman cannot retract.

Furious with herself for her folly in getting into this

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false position, furious with him for being the cause of her discomfiture, poor Cora pressed a button that signalled her coachman, and the carriage stopped.

"This is where you wanted to get out, is n't it?" she said coldly enough, though the fury of a woman scorned smouldered in her eye, and she jerked open the door.

The tone of Verney's reply was emphatic and decided.

"I think it is," he said.

CHAPTER XVI

LIGHT

HARRIET'S hurt feeling that Verney had not behaved at all kindly toward her in not coming to see her immediately upon his return from Saratoga had endured several days after that Sunday when he and Vandewater distinguished themselves by trying to sit each other out. It was swallowed up, however, in a flood of sympathy and concern one afternoon during a talk with Mr. Vernor, when she learned from him that Ellis's affairs were in bad shape financially and that his chance of making a successful run for Attorney-general was a small one if more money were not forthcoming. It looked, Mr. Vernor said, as if his nephew would not be able to meet the ordinary legitimate expenses of the campaign.

Vandewater, on the other hand, was spending money right and left with a free hand at the dictation of the Democratic politicians who had his interests in charge, and the result was beginning to show itself in the rapid development of a large and powerful constituency in his support. While the opposing candidate — Verney — was practically running his own campaign, Vandewater was entirely in the hands of his political friends, who

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for this reason and that, chiefly self-interested ones, had promised to get him the office for which he was running. Having nothing whatever to say about the conduct of the campaign, the young millionaire's only responsibility was to make a speech whenever his sponsors saw fit, and he was therefore free from the anxiety and worry to which Verney, as his own sponsor, was subjected. And Vandewater had proved himself not at all bad at making a speech. He talked easily, and seemed to have the trick of amusing his audiences, and greatest of all, he had a cast-iron nerve that no *contretemps*, however disturbing, could shake. Verney was finding him a hard man to beat.

And this state of affairs had so troubled Mr. Vernor, whose nephew's success was as dear to him as his own, that he was unable to forbear speaking of it to Harriet, and he poured the whole story of Verney's inability to compete with Vandewater's millions, and the sixteen-thousand-dollar handicap of debt under which he was laboring, into her sympathizing ears.

Harriet was shocked to hear it. It was difficult for her to believe that any one could be in such desperate case for the lack of so commonplace a thing as money. She had had it to spend all her life, and she found it hard to imagine what it would be like not to have it. Mr. Vernor's picture of Verney's straits made her realize it for the first time, and the realization wrung her heart. How terrible that her hero should run the risk of losing the election for such a reason! The idea

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became positive torture to her, and the night following Mr. Vernor's call she found herself quite unable to go to sleep as usual.

The knowledge that her friend, that Verney, was in such trouble, that he had the need of money to struggle against to bother him as well as the other hazards of the campaign, kept her awake. The picture of the Politician loaded down with care, harassed and anxious and pale as she had seen him once on that afternoon when they compared their poems on "Opportunity," would persist in appearing before her mental vision and prevented her from closing her eyes. At last she could bear it no longer. She sprang up, lit the gas and throwing a warm quilted robe about her, went to her desk. If he had no other friend to help him out in this emergency he had at least one. Why had n't she thought of it before. She would send him a cheque herself that very moment.

It was only one o'clock. Parker should post it that very night, so that Verney would get it the first thing in the morning and not suffer his distress of mind an instant longer than was necessary. With dark hair loosely tied back falling over one silk-clad shoulder and small fingers travelling swiftly over a page of her cheque book, in the simplest faith that as it was sent so would it be received — a simplicity by the way that always went hand in hand with her most generous impulses, her noblest deeds — Harriet filled out a cheque for twenty thousand dollars to the order of James Vernor Ellis. This she enclosed in an addressed envelope

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with her visiting card upon which she wrote the following lines :

“ Dear friend, accept this from a friend to use as you see fit, and save me from the distress of mind which the knowledge of your distress of mind for the lack of that of which I have so much, is causing me.”

Few words, in comparison to the magnitude of the gift accompanying them; but the greatest deeds are done with the least noise, and they seemed to Harriet quite adequate to convey her meaning. Having despatched Parker grumbling on his midnight errand, she went back to bed, satisfied that she had done an eminently right and proper thing — the mere duty of a mere friend, and friendly she still believed her interest in the young man to be; then she went to sleep, happy in the thought that the morning would find Verney free from care.

Ellis was lying on the lounge in his room at eleven o'clock the next day when a servant brought him up his letters. He had but lately returned from a tour of speech-making through the State with Oliver Ordway; he had managed to exhaust every ounce of nervous energy in him during the process, and had received doctor's orders upon his return home not to leave his room or do any work of any kind for three days, if he wished to repair the damage done and prevent further mischief.

It was the second day of his imprisonment, for as such he regarded it, and the depression of spirits which always accompanied these periods of forced inaction

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had complete possession of him. His body might rest if compelled to, but his restless, eager mind would not. To-day it ran exclusively upon his old anxiety — where was he to find money to discharge the obligations he had already incurred, and those he would have yet to incur if he was to make any kind of a running against Vandewater? Where could he turn for help? to whom could he possibly go? The question revolved itself over and over in his brain until he thought he should go mad.

The arrival of Wilson, therefore, with his mail, was a welcome diversion.

“Thank you,” he said, throwing away the cigarette the doctor had forbidden him to smoke — the fifth that day — and reaching out his hand for the letters.

“Anything I can do, sir?” queried the servant, with a pitying glance at the languid movements of the young man, his dark-circled, sleepless eyes and colorless face.

“Don’t think so. Unless you brought me a whiskey and soda!” He smiled mischievously. He knew, and Wilson knew, that whiskey and soda, like the cigarettes, was on the condemned list.

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Verney; you know the doctor’s orders,” replied the man, a sympathetic note in his voice.

Verney smiled wearily. “Oh, yes, I know! Black beans three times a day and ennui all the time — was n’t that the bill of fare he was good enough to prescribe?”

Wilson was “afraid so” and withdrew.

The prisoner turned over his letters listlessly. The familiar faces of three bills “past due” confronted him,

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a letter in Harriet's handwriting, and an invitation. The first three he put aside unopened, scanned the last hurriedly and threw it in the grate — it was an invitation to dinner to meet a popular debutante of the season — and then turned eagerly to the letter from Harriet. He could n't imagine what she could have to say to him, but certainly she was a fine little girl; and although it seemed circumstances had decreed that they were to see no more of each other, that did not prevent him from taking pleasure in hearing from her.

It did not take him a moment when he had opened the envelope to read the few lines inscribed upon Miss Rand's visiting card, or the few figures inscribed on the cheque, but it did take him some time to grasp what it all meant. When he did, he lay very still with his arm across his eyes and the cheque between his fingers for a long, long time. And who shall say what temptation did not assail him, what glorious visions of obligations met, enemies defeated, the feel of that slip of blue paper did not conjure up? What overpowering impulse to accept what the gods had set before him, asking no question for conscience' sake, did not rise within him?

Never had the way been so dark before him as at that time. That sixteen thousand dollars which he had discovered it was necessary for him to make that year in order to cover his liabilities was just as far from realization as it had been a month ago; his campaign expenses grew heavier every day; and he had been able to spend practically no time at all in his law office since his nomination. And now, he had suddenly come into the

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possession of sufficient funds not only to meet his indebtedness, but to help him through his campaign as well! Here he held it in his very hand, a free gift from a friend whose wealth was so great that the loss of the amount sent would never be felt, a gift unsought and unsolicited by him, a cheque for twenty thousand dollars.

He rose and walked slowly to his desk and began at once to write a letter. He wrote slowly and with apparent difficulty, his lip held tight in his teeth and his brow knit, but when he had finished and had signed his name to what he had written, he looked up and nodded reassuringly at the picture of Abraham Lincoln on the wall.

It was Harriet who opened that letter (for it was to her he had been writing), in the beautiful old library in Mrs. Chittenden's house, her favorite sitting-room. It said:

"DEAR HARRIET:

"I am returning the cheque which you were so very kind as to send me yesterday. I would do so in person if the doctor had not ordered me to stay indoors for three days on account of a slight indisposition. I appreciate to the utmost the divine friendliness with which you sent it, the divine compassion and generosity which prompted the act, and I pray that my inability to accept it will not wound you; but Harrie dear, I can't take it. I can't explain why very well, but the fact is it's impossible for a man to accept obligations of that kind from a woman.

"Your very grateful friend,

"JAMES VERNOR ELLIS."

When Harriet had read to the end and had found enclosed the cheque she had sent off so happily, so joy-

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ously, her disappointment was so keen that the tears filled her eyes. She tore the rejected bank order in two and, bowing her head, cried and cried. She had wanted to help him, but she had not been allowed to! A convention, a mere notion of honor, a false pride, had kept him from accepting it. It had seemed so natural to help him, such a simple matter just to send the money and say no more about it, she could n't quite understand why she had not been able to. She had wanted to do it more than anything she had ever wanted to do before in her life, but this great joy had been denied her. She had so much money she could n't begin to use it all or a third of it, but she could not give any of it, not even so small a sum as twenty thousand dollars to her friend who needed it so much! Her sobs redoubled at the thought.

Why did she cry? Was it her friendship for him that made her feel the disappointment so cruelly? Was this emotion that was shaking her, friendship? The question arrested her tears. She stood on a sudden self-revealed — this girl who had never been in love before and had not for that reason been able to recognize it when it came to her, and she knew on the instant that it was love, not friendship, this feeling that had overwhelmed her; she knew that it was love, not the friendliness with which he had credited her, that had prompted her to wish to render Verney assistance — that had made her send him the cheque.

A glow that had its inception in her heart mounted to her brain and suffused her consciousness. She bowed

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her head again, but this time shed no tears. What happiness! She loved him!

It was thus she was found by a maid an hour later lying full length in a Morris chair, her cheek pressed close against the letter that had so lately left his hand. Harriet had forgotten that it was receiving day and she was sorry to hear that Mrs. William Merivale Gibbs had been shown into the drawing-room and had asked to see her. She would a little rather have seen no one on *that* day!

CHAPTER XVII

THE FURY OF A WOMAN SCORNED

IF any one had told Harriet Rand when she arrived in New York that summer of the Republican National Convention, that any act in the life of a woman whom she knew so little as she did Mrs. Willie Gibbs would have power to alter the current of her own, she would have scouted the idea as highly improbable.

Yet such was the case. An act of Mrs. Gibbs was potent to do just that thing, so to affect Harriet Rand that the heretofore favored and propitious course of her life should become all in a moment troubled and tumultuous. And this act was the young married woman's break with Verney Ellis, a break which had been thrust upon her by her own folly in opening his eyes to the true character of her professed friendship for him. Although entirely the result of her own error in judgment, Mrs. Gibbs's discomfiture on that occasion none the less resulted in a feeling of bitter anger against the cause of it; which in turn resulted in a determination that whatever happened he should not be allowed to marry Miss Rand. For the idea that this was Verney's unacknowledged end and aim had taken hold of that lady's brain with all the pertinacity of a delusion, and her determination to frustrate it was the only balm she

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fortable, if ridiculous, plight from which he had so opportunely rescued her. And he had explained in his turn how it was that he had chanced to see horse and rider struggling in the ditch, and his surprise when he had discovered who the rider was.

Upon entering the house, Benton's housekeeper and distant cousin, Mrs. Pratt, took charge of Harriet and helped her to remove her wet riding-skirt and splashed coat before a fire in an upstairs room. The good lady was very kind and urged the loan of a black silk dress upon her guest, until her own things should have dried; but the girl declined the offer, declaring that her boots would muddy it, and that a long coat of some sort over her riding-breeches and linen waist was all she needed. Whereupon a covert driving-coat belonging to the master of the house was produced, which covered Harriet almost to her heels, and in which she clattered joyously downstairs to the dining-room where Benton and a supper which the young man had ordered made ready at once, awaited her. All her old spirits had returned to her by this time. The anxiety incident to her adventure was forgotten, and she was gloriously hungry.

"I know you're having dinner early just on my account," she said, as they sat down, flashing an appreciative glance at her host, "but I'm glad of it; I'm simply starved!"

"Not so very. I have it early myself in the country. And it is n't dinner, it's supper. I'm very much of a farmer, you know."

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He smiled happily as he spoke. It was too wonderful to be true that Harriet should be sitting opposite him at his own table, even if old Mrs. Pratt was there too, when only a little while ago he had thought her far away in New York. In his satisfaction over this miraculous fact he failed to see anything out of the way about her costume, though the covert coat was so big for her that she had to turn back the sleeves, and it trailed on the floor when she sat down.

"Is n't it becoming?" she asked, inferring from his prolonged scrutiny that it was the coat that had caught his attention.

"What?" he asked, innocent of any other motive for his gazing than a desire to feast upon the sight of her; and understanding this suddenly, she laughed pleasedly.

She was enjoying the whole thing exceedingly, the old-fashioned dining-room — painstakingly old-fashioned, with the very best old-fashionedness that money could buy, beamed ceiling, mullioned windows, china cupboards and all, that its owner had had copied from an old New England farmhouse,—the unshaded candles on the dark shining surface of the table, the delicious cold chicken, tender salad, and hot tea, and the aged domestic whose partiality for her master was so great that she insisted upon passing everything to him first, causing that gentleman such embarrassment.

As for Benton himself, her heart had never been so warm toward him. Had n't he as much as saved her life? And dear me, how good everything tasted!

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She only hoped, and expressed as much to the other two at the table, that Phantom was enjoying his oats as much as she enjoyed her supper. What was the aged domestic bringing in now?

She turned around in her chair with a childish eagerness which Benton — with whom she had always been at her gravest and most dignified — had never seen her display before, and thought utterly fascinating.

“Honey!” she cried, gazing with rapture at the crystal bowl of golden translucence that was passed to her. “Hot biscuits and honey! O Georgie, what a nice boy you are!”

“It’s from my own apiaries,” he said, flushing with pleasure at her pleasure; “I knew you liked it!”

After supper Harriet donned her skirt and coat, now quite dry and beautifully brushed, and Benton drove her home in a runabout. The distance between their homes was quite five miles by the road, but somehow on this occasion, and this had not always been the case on similar ones, it seemed as short to Harriet as to him.

That evening as she made ready for bed, rather early, for the day’s events had tired her, she regaled Dilly, who was assisting in the ceremony, with an account of her adventure, between little bursts of song.

But Dilly, who was by nature a pessimist, and proud of it, though she acknowledged her delight that so much of her pet’s old spirit had seemed to return, was not at all certain that the advent of George Ben-

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ton as a factor in Harriet's recovery of it, was to be regarded with any confidence.

"That's all very well, but just the same, Miss Harrie, I hope you're not going to be foolish enough to trust a man again! I wouldn't trust one"—if she had been a French marquise who had dealt with countless lovers in her time, this funny dumpy little woman with the pursed mouth and tight-screwed hair could hardly have spoken with an air of more experience—"around the corner as long as he was able to sit up and blow a feather off the table!"

But Harriet's surprising answer to this bit of uncompromising scepticism was a joyous laugh. In the young, not time but perfect health is the most potent quantity in the healing of a broken heart.

After that they rode every day of the remainder of the week, she and George Benton, and the amount of time she devoted to meditating upon her disappointment, and to arguing herself out of the idea that her life without Verney Ellis was going to mean nothing but unhappiness for her, grew less and less.

On the last day of her stay in Lake Forest, as they were riding together for the last time before her departure for New York that afternoon, George Benton, as was quite proper and fitting, asked her again if she would n't marry him. He had not asked her before, fearing to end those precious days with her prematurely, as her refusal of him must have done. They were riding up the beautiful winding drive that

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approached Mrs. Cumloch's country house through the park she had had laid out.

"Could n't you possibly think of it?" he said. "I'm a lazy, good-for-nothing fellow, I know, with nothing to interest myself in but my horses, but I'd try awfully hard to make you happy."

He reached over and closed his right hand over one of hers, reins and all.

She turned the deep gaze of the Madonna eyes he worshipped upon him, soberly, consideringly, silently. She thought he had never come so near being handsome, with the flush of honest feeling in his face, the faithful eyes dim behind their glasses, and his broad-shouldered, thin figure that never looked so well as in the saddle.

"I love you so very much!" he said, when he had waited a moment for her reply.

Ah! That was what she had wanted to hear, and he had nearly made the mistake of not telling her, in his fear that she had heard it so often she would not care to hear it again.

Her delicate skin took on a deeper bloom. Her spirit answered gratefully to that simple statement, warmed to it, and clung to it. Certainly it was a wonderful thing to be loved, and by a man she thought as much of as she did of the one who was pleading with her now.

There was, too, a new masterfulness about his pleading that she liked, that had never been there before though he had asked her that question a great many

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times, and that was the result of the something new that had characterized their intimacy of the past few days, of that atmosphere of hope which had been cast about those delightful hours together which had been granted George Benton, he knew, by special dispensation of Providence! It is a well-known fact that the man who asks knowing that he has a chance, is a different creature from the man who asks knowing he has none. There is a ring and a way about the first that goes far toward getting him what he wants. At least it had that effect now, in Benton's case.

Harriet turned her fingers under the possessive hand that covered hers, and clasped his rather tightly.

"You've asked me that a great many times, George," she said, "and I've said 'No' a great many times. But now — but now —"

She took her hand from him and regarded him with a touching expression of confidence, of affection, and of shy gladness.

"Although I can't say 'yes,' I won't" — very slowly — "say 'no.'"

Touching her horse with her spur, she rode off at a gallop toward the house, leaving behind her an incredulous, much amazed man with a hope in his heart that he would not have exchanged for any certainty in the world — except one.

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sight of Ellis; and as he disengaged himself from the men he was walking with and came up to her, "Aunt Lydia did n't feel well and she's gone home, but we wanted, Mr. Benton and I,"—she glanced at the young man at her side,—“to wait and congratulate you on your speech.”

“It was a wonder,” said Benton in something the same phrase he had used in praising another speech of Ellis's, the one he had made at the Republican National Convention as long ago as the preceding June. “I tell you it made me feel like a criminal, to think I've paid so little attention to elections and voting and things! I'm always travelling around election times, or else I've been so busy on my farm I have n't voted, you know.” He ended in an apologetic tone that would almost have made Verney laugh if the speaker had n't been so evidently sincere.

Verney believed he had every reason to dislike Benton, whom he barely remembered having met that time of the Chicago Convention. Was he not openly devoting himself to Harriet Rand? and was not his devotion apparently received with favor? But he could not help feeling pleased by his enthusiasm and honest expression of admiration for himself.

“It's not too late to begin to pay attention now,” he said, with his quick, friendly smile.

The other man ceased polishing his glasses excitedly and beamed back.

“No,” he said, “and I mean to, the minute I get home, but I wish you'd talk some more about it to me.”

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tude was made clear toward such questions as direct primaries and public service commissions.

To the former he was opposed, characterizing the system of direct nomination as an experiment which appeared to contain evils as great as those of the present system. While he acknowledged that the purpose of the direct nomination plan was commendable, to give members of the party at large a greater share in the choice of the party's nominees and to put an end to corrupt boss domination, he maintained that it had not worked out that way in other States where it had been in use. It had resulted in increasing the power of money in politics, he said, by making necessary the expenditure of large sums at the primaries, and had doubled the labor of election to office by necessitating two campaigns instead of one; and in this connection — since it is true the man must seek the office, not the office the man — it had acted as a deterrent to the entry of the best men into public life. He said too that he could not endorse the system because he regarded it as an obstacle to organization, inasmuch as the party would find it difficult to act under it for the purpose of fusion with other parties, or for the suitable distribution of offices among localities or groups in the party. Also, with direct primaries there was the possibility, as had been proved in other States, of nominations being made by a minority of the party, while he himself believed in the convention system of nominating in which the majority ruled and where representation was by delegates. As for abuses in party

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management, the existence of which he did not deny, he was convinced they could be corrected.

He was opposed also to the public service commissions as a means of regulating public affairs, and on the ground that their continued and indiscriminate use would result in a government by commissions instead of by the officers elected under the Constitution. He was quoted as saying, however, that he believed a certain amount of regulation was necessary, and that if he should come into office he would recommend to the Legislature the retention of the commission system inaugurated by the preceding Governor for some time longer, in order to give it every chance of proving its efficiency in that respect, although he would at the same time endeavor to limit the commissions so as to render them less expensive and more quick to act.

Ordway announced himself in short as being for less legislation on new and untried lines, and less interference with personal and economic liberty; and these doctrines (which were identical with those Verney favored and which constituted his reason, apart from personal friendship, for desiring Ordway's election) the young candidate was endeavoring to disseminate throughout the State and in Manhattan. As they struck the keynote of the temperate and neutral mass of voters who form a class between the two extremes of the reformers and the indifferent, he was winning to himself many adherents. Speaking in opera houses, townhalls, and often from the end of a railroad car, he had travelled from one town to another, spreading

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the gospel of Republicanism as he saw it, and meeting everywhere with an enthusiastic reception.

A ten-o'clock meeting at Fredonia filled the opera house to overflowing, and hundreds were unable to get in. At Oswego he was met by a company of militia, from which place he went by automobile to the mills across the river, where he made a brief out-of-doors address to hundreds of the operatives. At Syracuse, although he did not speak, he kept open house in the car and shook hands with a great number of people. Practically the whole town of Batavia, where he gave a five-minute talk from the platform, turned out to greet him; and at Dunkirk, when his train pulled into the depot one night at about eight o'clock, he found a typical election-time throng of people filling the streets, cheering and burning red fire.

On some of these occasions, Verney, who accompanied Ordway on his campaign tour, was the principal speaker; but during the three days which the candidate for Governor had reserved for campaigning in Manhattan, the young men worked separately, addressing independent audiences. The Politician was confident of success, at least, of his friend's success.

"Of course we 'll win," he told Ordway confidently one day. "The national ticket and the State ticket are sure to be victorious. The head of each, at least, I mean," he added, smiling at the other. "Wall Street shows plainly enough which way the wind is blowing; stocks are holding firm, and people are n't a bit excited, just waiting, that's all."

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And indications seemed to justify his optimism. A triple canvass of the same districts by different persons had been made by an enterprising voting league, and from the result of this poll it seemed that Ordway would have only from seven to eight votes on the average of each election District behind the Republican Presidential candidate. It looked as if he would be elected Governor of New York State by a large majority, and that his total vote would not be likely to fall behind the head of the ticket to a greater extent than forty thousand votes.

As for the less important contest between Verney and Billy Vandewater for Attorney-general, the chances of each candidate seemed more nearly equal. The respective status of each had been clearly defined in the public mind at the beginning of the campaign by the sobriquets which had been given each by his enemies. Vandewater's good family, good looks, and good money, together with his generally well-dressed appearance and his habit of riding to all political meetings in a large 60-horse-power motor car, had earned for him that of "the silk-stockings candidate"; and Verney, in spite of his good family, and on account of his well-known position of influence in the Republican party machine (he had been executive member of his District for a long time), had become generally known as "The Politician," — the same name by which in derision Mrs. Presbey and others of his family who were not in sympathy with his political aspirations were accustomed

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to call him, and by which he was known to Harriet Rand's tenderest and most admiring thoughts.

Yet each candidate had as many friends as enemies among the voting public who adhered neither to one party nor to the other; for while there were large numbers of persons who were irked by the Democratic candidate's habitually immaculate appearance, his chauffeur, and the air of condescension which was as much a part of him as his dissipated eyes, there were a great many who gloried in that very condescension and boasted that "our candidate belongs to one of New York's oldest families." Some human beings seem naturally to thrive on boot-licking, and among these Vandewater found ardent supporters.

There were also a great number of people who thought Verney's knowledge of affairs, his practical acquaintance with politics, an advantage rather than a detriment in the matter of his proving an efficient Attorney-general. They thought a man who was familiar with the operation of the voting system on election days would be better able to prosecute cases having to do with illegal voting,—and an Attorney-general would almost certainly have to face cases of that kind during his term of office,—than a man who was n't.

Unfortunately, however, so far as Verney's success in the campaign was concerned, in elections the voters who really stop to consider the merits and demerits of a candidate are in the minority; and the voters who hurrah for the man who seems the most popular, who

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talks the loudest and sets up the most drinks are in the majority. On the same principle that a man at a ball goes up to ask for a dance to the girl who is already surrounded by men instead of to the one who is not. Half the time he does n't really think she's so much more attractive than her less fortunate sister, but he goes because the other men are there, and he wants to be in the swim.

"Entertaining" was certainly Vandewater's long suit. He had unlimited private means, so that his activities were not at all restricted by the meagre sums appropriated by his party for his campaign expenses. Halfway through the campaign it was his boast that he had dined or lunched with every "boss" of any account in New York City, and this had kept him a great deal busier than in expounding the principles of Democracy.

Yet, too, it was generally conceded he made a good speech. If he did n't succeed in proving the superiority of his party over the other, or in showing cause why he should be elected rather than his rival, he did succeed, chiefly on account of the facility with which he kept an audience amused, in drawing large crowds to hear him speak, and establishing a wide personal popularity. And personal popularity is oftentimes all that is required to elect a man.

This Verney knew very well, and he was too good a politician not to understand how great an appeal Vandewater's free-handed generosity and his trick of being amusing made to the popular mind. That was

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what made him so anxious about the result of the contest,—because he was himself terribly handicapped in the first respect by the shortness of his campaign funds, and in the second by his own limitations as a speaker. It was true, as he was quite aware, that his very earnestness prevented him from making his speeches as entertaining as his rival's. He had so much to say, it took so much time to tell the people what he thought they came to hear, what his party was able to do for them, and in what manner their candidate for Governor and he himself intended to serve them if they had the chance, that he could n't find time to drag in stories for the sole purpose of getting a laugh. This is not to say that he never told them, but that he did so only when they served to illustrate a point and were not irrelevant. For while he believed devoutly in the importance of employing the right kind of method to gain attention for what he said, he believed even more devoutly in the importance of having something worth while to say, and of saying it.

It was on the first night of the three days which Verney had planned to devote exclusively to speech-making in New York, that he found he had to address the largest gathering he had faced since the beginning of the campaign.

The meeting was held in one of the down-town theatres and every possible device to attract a crowd having been employed by the party managers, including fireworks from the roof of the building, three blocks of red fire outside and a brass band at the door,

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it was packed to suffocation. Ellis, seated on the platform with a large representation of the political intellects of the city headed by a political club, looked about with satisfaction at the well-filled house, the rows of G. A. R. men in front, the crowded galleries, and the women in the stage boxes. He was n't fond of speaking, and he had a poor opinion of his powers in that line, but he was grateful for the sake of the party he represented that the seats were all taken.

The president of the political club had just risen for the purpose of introducing the candidate for Attorney-general as the principal speaker of the evening, when the young man's eye caught sight of three late arrivals entering the box directly to the left of the stage and taking possession of the remaining seats in it. They were Mrs. Cumloch, Miss Rand, and George Benton.

Verney smiled faintly. He was glad Harriet had come. They had not seen each other since Mrs. Ordway's dinner party the day after Harriet's return from her week in Chicago, which Verney understood had to do with the necessity of closing the house in Lake Forest for the winter. On that occasion they sat side by side at the table and talked to each other as freely and laughed as gayly as if they had never in their lives known an unhappy moment together, as if the golden thread of their feeling for each other had never been abruptly broken, as if the voice of fate — which was in Verney's case the voice of ambition whether unselfish or not — had not said to them "Stop! Thus far

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and no farther. Hereafter your ways must be separate ways."

As for George Benton's presence in the box, it was easily explained. He was a man of quick action when once aroused, and acting at once on the hope Harriet had held out to him when they parted in Lake Forest, he had followed her to New York on the next train. His sudden arrival had greatly surprised Mrs. Cumloch, who was unable to keep herself from building all sorts of air castles on the strength of it. She did not quite dare, however, to question her niece, and the less so as Harriet seemed to take Benton's arrival as a matter of course. The week following had seen the young man from Chicago in the role of the most devoted of suitors, walking on the Avenue with Miss Rand, motoring with her, and going with her to the theatre, though in the latter case Mrs. Cumloch invariably made one of the party.

News of this devotion of his had been brought to Verney's ears by Mr. Vernor, who had never been able to break himself of the habit of dropping in on his friends in Forty-ninth Street even after the advent of this ardent young man from the West, who seemed to be thoroughly at home there, so that even if Verney had not remembered Benton, whom he had met in June at Mrs. Cumloch's dinner in Lake Forest, he would have known who he was and of his attentions to Harriet. He knew, too, and from the same source — for Richmond Vernor had never ceased to mourn that his nephew

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persisted so determinedly in refusing to take advantage of his chance with Miss Rand, which the older man was as positive as ever still existed, and to reproach him for the same,—that Billy Vandewater had by no means retired from the running himself and, so far as his campaign activities would permit, had been assiduously pressing his suit with the young heiress by means of daily instalments of flowers and bonbons and flying calls at her house in his motor between speeches.

But these things Verney heard with the mask-like calm and indifferent smile of the non-combatant. The news of this ardent courtship by these rival suitors of the girl, whose society he had himself once sought with the same ardor, concerned him, he felt, no more than “the thunder of the captains and the shouting” concerns the soldier in the battle who lies dead under their feet.

He was out of the fight, he knew, and though it might be harder than he thought, though it might make him suffer as he had not thought of suffering, he must, he knew equally well, remain so. He must sit by, looking on without lifting his hand to prevent it, until the end—until the girl had promised to make one or the other of the contestants, a happy man. That was his portion in life, that was the part he had elected to play.

There were present, Verney saw as he rose to begin his speech, a number of what the newspapers call society people, most of whom he knew. In one group under the chaperonage of the gay little Mrs. de Albert he

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saw Gladys Leverich and his sister Carol and the two young men who had been with Mrs. Ordway's party at the open-air horse-show, Robin Hill and Gerald Merrick. In another he recognized Mrs. Ordway herself and two men who had been at college with Oliver Ordway, and who were now his wife's almost constant companions. In an upper box he observed the beautiful Mrs. Gibbs's plumed hat and long slender shoulders just visible above its railings, and smiled to see the blonde head and boyish form of Stevie Cass beside her.

"Poor Cora!" he thought pityingly — for pity is the only sentiment a man cherishes toward the woman who has tried to make a fool of him and failed,— "she must amuse herself, I suppose," and he turned to face his audience.

It was not with satisfaction, however, that he faced it. His minute's survey was sufficient to tell him that it was largely composed of that element among the public which looks upon elections and campaigns only as a chance for fun. He was neither a great actor nor a born orator, but his training in politics had endowed him with the great actor's and born orator's faculty of "sizing up" an audience. It was disappointing to find it so, but he was none the less certain that curiosity and a desire for entertainment had gathered these people together, more than anything else. Among the "society people" present, for instance, he knew his friends had come only to hear Verney Ellis speak,— no matter what he said,— and his enemies to ridicule Verney Ellis,— no matter what he said. It

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was maddening, but true, that in both cases their interest was purely personal. As for the main body of people there, he felt that they were indifferent. Their attitude said plainly enough, "These elections have nothing to do with me, but I'll listen," as they leant back in their chairs and prepared themselves for the duty with the air of doing some one a favor.

There were indeed any number of indications observable to his quick eye that helped to convince him that the enormous concourse of people sitting there in the theatre waiting to hear him speak had come for any number of other reasons besides a desire for light on the question of the State elections. The simple statement of fact that was all that had been required of him by his village audiences in his tour of the State, and that had been all-sufficient to press home the fitness of the Republican party to select men for public office who would make for honest and efficient government, he realized would be powerless to make an impression on this cosmopolitan New York audience, whose sole idea that evening was to be diverted.

The fact was they did n't care about the elections, these people; they did n't care who won or what party came into power. With a feeling of indignation that it was so Verney saw that it was his task that night to *make* them care; that his problem was not to prove the superiority of one candidate or one party in the coming elections, but to arouse interest in the elections themselves. The smiling, tolerant front which his hearers in general presented to him, which said as plainly

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as words could say it, "I came to be amused, I wonder if the young man on the platform is going to do it," enraged Verney not a little, and he fell upon it with the bitter determination to dent it or die.

In the heat of his resentment of this attitude, in his eagerness to make his auditors discard it, he forgot his dislike of public speaking and dared to be eloquent. But true eloquence is as different from spread-eagleism as the sun from the moon, and Verney, to achieve it, had to steer a masterly course between the rocks of flamboyancy and the reef of false sentiment; and being a first-class politician he accomplished the feat without once mentioning Alexander Hamilton, or beginning a period with "from the Atlantic to the Pacific, from the statue of Liberty to the Golden Gate," or indulging in "grand grammar."

He began his speech with a fiery denunciation of indifference as an attitude toward elections. He said it was the duty of every one to be interested, that it was the duty of every man to join the army of voters and that that army should go to the polls just as any army went to war,—to fight. That if the people believed the party bosses controlled the primaries, that was all the more reason why they should attend the primaries in force to protect their interests, instead of staying away, and that every man who did n't vote at the primaries was a deserter. He said the Republic needed the support of every one of its citizens if it was to endure; and that if every citizen took an interest in government it would endure; and that Governments in the

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past had been well known to have fallen from lack of the support of the people. Here he was interrupted, to his surprise — for he was not looking for applause, — by a burst of cheering. Those who least deserve it are usually the ones most complacent about accepting flattery, and the loudest cheers that met Verney's implication that the people were all-powerful, came from the throats of those least active in public affairs.

"You say one man's vote can't matter?" he asked, leaning forward with flashing eyes. "I say you are wrong. The coöperation of every citizen in the Republic is essential to the preservation of the balance of power upon which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend.

"You say that's too much to ask of every citizen; that he has n't time to coöperate, to show interest in public affairs; that if honest and efficient government is dependent upon personal exertion, it's too big a price too pay? I say again that you are wrong; that no price is too big to pay for honest and efficient government [he raised his hand to quell the instant applause this statement elicited], and that no patriot can do less than pay it." The clapping burst forth unchecked.

"And I use the word 'patriot' seriously," he went on, "although a great many people don't seem to understand what it means. They seem to think patriotism is a thing to be ashamed of, a sentiment to be put away and only brought out and used on the Fourth of July and other national holidays; but it's not. It is n't a brass band and a bunch of flags, it's a concrete force

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for good"—he nodded energetically to emphasize each word,—“that if put into practical operation in politics at election times can meet corruption on its own ground and vanquish it single-handed!” (Applause. People like to hear about vice being put to rout, even if they are too lazy to want to help to rout it themselves.)

“To my mind a man requires to be only two things in order to be eligible to public office, a patriot and a politician. In order to see why the second requirement is necessary, assuming that the first is admitted, the definition of the term ‘politician’ must be thoroughly understood.

“The general interpretation of the word is, I believe, synonymous with the term ‘ward boss.’ It is at least synonymous with the phrase ‘power wielded for evil.’ This idea is so common it has become a fact that the worst thing one enemy in the campaign can say about another is that he’s a ‘politician.’” He stopped and smiled, as the audience, realizing that he made this statement from personal experience, laughed appreciatively.

“But this connotation of the word is not the correct one,” he went on. “To be called a politician is not in itself a reproach to any man. Because, as I read in some magazine recently, no man can be, not to say a successful, but a competent public man, unless he understands and likes and practises the game of politics.”

(“I guess that’s so,” said those present who had previously thought all politicians must be bad men,

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and "Of course, that's so," said those of the maligned who were there.)

"A very good definition of a politician that I found in the same article," continued Verney, "is that he's a man who possesses certain qualities that are essential to a proper conduct of public affairs, and without which he will fall short of the highest efficiency if opportunity should place him in an important administrative position.

"That is n't to say, you know," he added earnestly, "that there are no corrupt politicians. I would n't attempt to deny that any more than I would attempt to deny that there are corrupt men in any other walk of life; and to quote further, it is n't to say that every politician is a good administrator, either, but it *is* to say that every good administrator is a politician. [Applause.]

"You are not to understand from this that I think that only a politician by actual practice is eligible to office, but that I am convinced the man who proves to be able when in office has generally by nature something of the politician in him.

"It is not, either, only the men who have power and money that get the offices; the idea that the average citizen who has no pull stands no chance to run for office is a mistaken one, and no excuse at all for indifference to elections. For it is true now as it was then, what Abraham Lincoln said in one of his speeches, that 'it is the glory of this great Republic that its highest places are open to its humblest citizens; that American

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institutions make it possible that to hold the highest places in the State not glitter of wealth is needed, or trickery, or demagogery; only honesty, hard thinking, and fixed resolve!’ [Tumultuous applause in response to this quotation from “Old Abe.”]

“But to return to my text,” he smiled around him as if he felt he had neared the end of what he had felt pressing so upon him to say, “that the coöperation of every voter in the country is necessary to gain and maintain good government,—what I’m trying to impress upon you to-night is that in order to get a thing it is necessary to want it first. We must really want good government before we can expect to get it; we must be anxious to fight corruption before we can conquer it. In spite of the fact that a small minority of empty heads laugh at reform and its promoters [he glanced pleasantly but piercingly around at the various fashionables present who largely represented the class he referred to, and they squirmed uneasily in their seats], we must wish for reform before we can expect to improve the present condition of things.

“This fight against corruption has been going on a long time, but it has never been so active as in the past ten years. Previous to that time impurity in political conditions, though present, has been unacknowledged and glossed over, so that it was difficult to deal with; but now, owing to the tide of investigation and reform that has been sweeping over the country, it has been routed out into the light of day. Like the measles, when the nature of the disease has been

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discovered, the spots have appeared on the outside. [Laughter.] And they will soon be gotten rid of. For we're all of us, when you come right down to it — Democrats, Independents, and Republicans,— working together to one end,—to make this the greatest country in the world! [Applause.] And whether by means of direct nomination or by means of the convention, by means of new-school reform or old-school reform, by abolishing old institutions or introducing new ones, we're going to succeed!

“The method of succeeding is n't so important. The important thing is that if we care enough to wish for reform, if we're patriotic enough honestly to want honest and efficient government and make up our minds to have it —” he lowered his voice suddenly to a pitch that thrilled, each word being distinctly audible,—“*we are going to get it!*”

He sat down amidst a storm of applause so spontaneous, so genuine, and so prolonged, that it gave good promise to the young man that he had succeeded in making that difficult audience care if it was only for that evening, and he felt that in spite of the fact that he had not touched upon the various issues of the campaign or boomed the Republican candidate for Governor, or heaped personal abuse upon his rival, he had accomplished something, and that it had not been time wasted.

His friend Tommy Beekman, however, was not so sure of that as Verney was. Advancing to congratulate his friend on the success of his speech, which he could

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not deny, he took occasion at the same time to reproach him that he had been so general in his statements, and had departed so from the style of his previous speeches.

"You did n't boost the grand old party once," he complained, "or cheer for Oliver, or roast Billy the snob!"

Verney smiled deprecatingly.

"Well, you see," he said, "I had so many other things on my mind to say. The minute I looked at that damned audience, I knew most of them came for fun or for curiosity, not because they were interested in the elections, and it made me mad. I wanted to say something that would stir them up and set them thinking. I'd rather have them vote against us than not at all, you know."

"You stirred them up, I should say," admitted Beekman.

"And then, you know, Tommy," Verney added confidentially, "I never had a chance before to talk at so many people that could n't get away from me! I had to make the most of it!" He laughed outright.

"Well, never mind," said his friend magnanimously; "it does n't matter so much. Ordway is pretty solid in New York, you know, anyway. I was only afraid it would n't win as many votes for you personally as your other speeches have."

But the event did not justify the little Albany man's apprehensions in that respect. For the most part the people were saying to themselves as they filed out of the theatre to the strains of "Yankee Doodle" played

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by the big band at the door, "I don't care what party he belongs to; I'm going to vote for him not because he's a Republican or because he is n't, but because I'd like a man like that, who is n't afraid to speak his mind, who is in earnest, who *really* thinks, and says what he thinks, too,—for Attorney-general. It speaks well for his ability to defend the people's interests."

The newspapers printed the speech the next morning, and some of them said it was very good; and others said that the doctrine of Patriotism — a sentiment that knew no party and acknowledged no leader — as preached by a party man and a member of the machine, was political chicanery and nothing else; and that the young man who made the speech was an experienced politician and nothing else, who knew the vote-getting value of the sentiment of patriotism properly appealed to, and cared not at all for the sentiment itself. Thousands of people read the speech, nevertheless, and without paying any attention to what the newspapers said one way or the other, a great number of them voted for Verney on the strength of it. Genuine uprightness and principle, even if it is found in a machine politician, is not after all so very difficult to recognize.

In the lobby of the theatre Verney encountered Harriet. She was standing by a pillar, her sweet face and large black eyes evidently searching the crowd for some one as it passed her. Mrs. Cumloch was not to be seen, but George Benton was at her elbow.

"Oh, there you are!" she cried eagerly, catching

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sight of Ellis; and as he disengaged himself from the men he was walking with and came up to her, "Aunt Lydia did n't feel well and she's gone home, but we wanted, Mr. Benton and I,"—she glanced at the young man at her side,—“to wait and congratulate you on your speech.”

“It was a wonder,” said Benton in something the same phrase he had used in praising another speech of Ellis's, the one he had made at the Republican National Convention as long ago as the preceding June. “I tell you it made me feel like a criminal, to think I've paid so little attention to elections and voting and things! I'm always travelling around election times, or else I've been so busy on my farm I have n't voted, you know.” He ended in an apologetic tone that would almost have made Verney laugh if the speaker had n't been so evidently sincere.

Verney believed he had every reason to dislike Benton, whom he barely remembered having met that time of the Chicago Convention. Was he not openly devoting himself to Harriet Rand? and was not his devotion apparently received with favor? But he could not help feeling pleased by his enthusiasm and honest expression of admiration for himself.

“It's not too late to begin to pay attention now,” he said, with his quick, friendly smile.

The other man ceased polishing his glasses excitedly and beamed back.

“No,” he said, “and I mean to, the minute I get home, but I wish you'd talk some more about it to me.”

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He turned to Harriet. "Can't we all go and have supper somewhere?" he asked eagerly. "It's only twelve o'clock."

Harriet smiled indulgently. "We couldn't do that very well, George, but we might go home and get something to eat," she said. "Aunt Lydia was to send the carriage back for us, you know."

"Will you, Ellis?" asked Benton, taking up the invitation promptly.

Verney had planned some more work to do that night, as it happened, but Benton's anxiety that he should be of the party was so genuine, and the appeal in Harriet's eyes so sweet that he decided on the instant to delay it.

"Of course, I will come," he agreed, and they went and found the carriage.

Mrs. Cumloch had gone up to her room when they reached the house, but she sent word that coffee and sandwiches would be served to them in a few minutes, if they would excuse her from coming down.

The three made themselves comfortable in the dining-room, where the long dark table reflected the low-hung Tiffany light and a leaping grate fire.

"I'm much too excited to eat," said Harriet, seating herself in the big leather chair at one end of the table; "you see, I've never been at a political meeting before. How about you two?"

"My appetite," said Verney, as the two men sat down one on each side of her, "is like old dog Tray,

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nothing can drive it away, not even having to make a speech to a crowd of people who don't want to hear it."

"It seems to me a terrible reflection on the country that you should be able to make that statement," remarked Benton. "I suppose it will all be changed, Harriet, and there will be no more indifference when women vote?"

"But they never will," affirmed Ellis quickly; "this woman's-suffrage business is only an agitation of the moment." That there was any place for women in politics was an inconceivable idea to him.

"I don't know," said Harriet, loyal to her sex, though she hated to disagree with Verney, "I believe it's here to stay."

"And I believe," he replied, "that in a year or two the whole thing will be as much an exploded theory as the one that the earth is square instead of round, or the theory of affinities."

"It's making noise enough, certainly," said Harriet, "as far as exploding is concerned; but," she added, "don't you believe in affinities? Don't you believe that there is just one woman in the world for every man?"

"Candidly, I don't," returned Verney, "and I'll tell you why."

"I confess I'm interested."

"You see," he said smiling, "if you'll look it up in the encyclopædia, you'll find that there are, as a matter of fact, more women in the world than there are men!"

They all laughed, and the talk drifted on.

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The two men were slow in starting their promised discussion of politics, perhaps because they were conscious of a feeling of restraint in the presence of the girl who, they were both aware, had played an important part in the life of each; and at first they addressed all their remarks to Miss Rand rather than to each other.

But Harriet, while appreciating the situation perfectly, was nevertheless resolute in her determination that these men whom she thought so much of should also think a great deal of each other; and with tireless activity and skill she returned the ball of conversation which they sent her in turns, so that it had to bound between both men at least once before it was down and out.

And before long under the unfluence of her impartial turning from one to the other, as if both were equally her friends, and as if they knew it, Verney's feeling of resentment against this man for the high place he seemed to hold in Harriet's estimation, and Benton's embarrassment in the presence of the man he had once feared as a rival, vanished, and the two were soon having the ball all to themselves, sending it back and forth between them without once throwing it in Harriet's direction.

But the girl did not mind. Clearly Verney was interested in George, she could tell that by the attention with which he listened to what he had to say, and by the sparkle of eagerness in his own eyes when he replied;

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and George was of course thoroughly charmed by Verney — that was to be expected.

The eyes of the young men met and flashed with greater frequency, and their discussion became more and more animated as the hour wore away, and Harriet, watching them, leaned back in her chair with the contented air of one who sees a good work well done. ,

CHAPTER XXI

"NOT LAUNCELOT OR ANOTHER"

HARRIET was sitting at Mrs. Chittenden's grand piano in the upstairs sitting-room, not many mornings later, playing Massenet's "Elégie." Her aunt had gone out to a dress-maker's appointment, and she was alone. It was a comfortable sunny room occupying the whole front width of the long narrow house, and very pleasing to the eye with its mushroom-colored walls, its yellow silk curtains at the windows, and the gold-colored cushions heaped on brown velvet divan and chair. A splendid oil painting of the Bridge of Sighs hung over the piano and under it on the glittering ebony of the instrument a great sheaf of dark-red roses lay.

Harriet's eyes were fixed upon the flowers as she played, although her thoughts were not with the sender, Billy Vandewater, whose daily gift they were; they dwelt rather upon love itself than upon any one man — upon its beauty, its mystery, its elusiveness, and its pain. The subdued minor plaint of Massenet's music, with its murmur of passion, its perpetual crying out at the wonder of life, was sweet in her ears, perhaps because she thought she had so recently parted with

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happiness, perhaps because happiness in reality was flying toward her on outstretched wings.

She did not analyze the feeling; she only knew, as she drew the beautiful melody from the willing keys and gave it to the room, that it spoke to her, that it soothed and comforted her as if it said, “All happiness is relative; the flower of love is not everlasting, and affection, comradeship, friendship, the nature of which is more enduring, are things very much worth the having.”

She stopped playing, clasped her hands with her elbows on the keyboard, and sat musing. Presently a maid came up and announced that Miss Rand had a caller, a young man. There was no card, and he had not given his name, and the maid, who was new, did not know it.

“Bring him up here,” said Harriet.

She knew it must be either George Benton or Billy Vandewater. No one but a lover would expect her to know his name without any help from him, by second sight as it were, and no one but a lover would call at eleven o'clock in the morning. Which was it, she wondered. She had seen both men almost every day since her return from Chicago, and it might as well be one as the other. She grew quite excited trying to guess which it could be before he came, even going so far as to look in the tall mirror at the other end of the room, though she was no coquette, to see if her plain blue silk morning dress was as becoming as she hoped.

It was Vandewater, probably, she thought — she had seen George Benton last. She looked at the roses lying

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in their splendor on the top of the piano, and was conscious of a half regretful feeling that she was not made happier by the thought. He was a very fascinating man, Vandewater, and she was interested in him; he aroused in her the woman's instinct to reform, for she was not unfamiliar with his reputation for fast living; but she knew, too, as she looked at his roses, that the only feeling she could ever have for him, although she was not at all positive he wanted her to have a different one, was —

The maid appeared in the doorway and George Benton followed her into the room.

"Oh, it was you!" cried Harriet, low but rather joyously, because of her surprise.

"Of course!" he said fondly. "Whom did you think? But let's sit down, I've got a grand piece of news for you."

"I thought it must be something unusual to bring you at this hour." She sat down on the divan in the window.

"Not at all," he reproached, seating himself beside her; "I'd come at this time every day if you would let me!"

She laughed. "Well, go on, what's your news?"

He polished his glasses excitedly. "It's the greatest thing in the world; you'll never believe it." He paused, looking at her eagerly.

"How irritating you are!" she said with emphasis; "you're worse than a girl for keeping people in suspense! What is the greatest thing in the world?"

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“You know how good he’s been about letting me help him with his campaign work this last week?” he asked seriously.

“Verney, you mean? Yes, I know. He’s kept you so busy, I’ve hardly seen anything of you.”

She had seen him once at least every day, but the young man nevertheless seemed pleased by the statement. He flushed to the roots of his negative light-brown hair.

“Do you mean that?” he stammered; “do you mean, I mean, you care how much you see me?”

His eagerness confused Harriet a little, but it did not displease her.

“Of course,” she answered stoutly, “but do go on with your news.”

“It’s the greatest thing in the world; you’ll never believe it!” said Benton, who was not given to profligacy in speech. If a phrase or a sentence said what he wanted to say the first time he used it, he had no shame about using it a second.

“If you say that again,” she announced positively, “I’ll go right out of the room; I will truly, Georgie!”

“No, wait! Don’t go! I’ll tell you,” he said, rising as if he could conquer his emotion better on his feet. “He’s such an awfully fine man, such a dead game sport”—it was his favorite expression,—“works so hard, you know, against such odds!” He stopped, confronting the girl. “He’s a king, Harriet! that’s what he is, a king.”

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"I know it," she assented, "and I'm so glad to have you know it, too."

"So am I! Why, I would n't have missed knowing him for all the money I'm going to lose on my stock farm this year! It's given me a new interest in life just to come in contact with an enthusiast like him. I've always been such a lazy beggar, you know." He sighed ruefully, but brightened as Harriet shook her head. "It's been a liberal education to see how that fellow works, to meet anyone that cares about anything as he cares about politics, to see how he goes at the thing!"

"Is n't it wonderful? Is n't it tremendous?" said Harriet.

Benton walked excitedly up and down. "I don't know what it will all come to, I don't know that I'll actually go in for politics myself at all; but if it was only for the faith in myself it's given me to see him make life so much worth the living, I'd feel indebted to him."

"Dear George!" said Harriet, "dear George!" There was genuine fondness in her eyes as she looked at him.

"And that is n't all," he said, turning to her, his good, honest face abeam. "Do you know what he's done now, Harriet? what he did last night? what I came to tell you about?"

"No," she said with mock despair, "and I don't believe I ever shall know!"

"Yes," he said; "I'm going to tell you. You know

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how hard up he's been, trying to meet the expenses of this campaign? They've altogether exceeded the amount the party appropriated for it, you know, Vandewater has set such a pace.”

“Yes? Yes?”

“Well,” he lowered his voice as if what he had to say were too wonderful for any other method of communication, “last night he told me—I made him promise—that he'd let me give him enough to cover all costs in excess of what he could raise to spend, and enough to finish up the campaign with gloriously! What do you think of that?”

His face was radiant.

“Oh, George, no!” she said.

“Yes,” he asseverated triumphantly, “it was only a few thousands.” Then he grew graver. “It made so much difference to him, it made me ashamed to have it make so little difference to me. It does n't seem right, somehow, that a man like that should be handicapped because he has n't money enough to do things, when I've got it to throw away—does it?”

Harriet came close up to him and looked up into his kindly face glowing with generosity, with tears in her eyes.

“Perhaps not,” she said, “but all the same I think you're the finest man in the world for giving it to him.”

And of her own accord she put both arms about his neck and kissed him.

Harriet went into Mrs. Cumloch's room late that night, as she always did before going to bed, and told

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her aunt with a calm, tranquil smile that she was engaged to George Benton.

The older lady's immediate reply to this astonishing communication — for that sort of announcement, no matter how much it is expected, is nevertheless always a surprise when it comes — was a silent embrace.

They discussed the important happening later, of course, at length; but at the moment of its impartment, Mrs. Cumloch, aware as she was of the other hope her niece had cherished, could find no words with which to congratulate her on the fulfilment of the opposite one so long entertained by herself. Harriet was grateful for this quiet acceptance of her announcement, suspecting as she did that her attachment for Verney Ellis had not been unremarked by her aunt. She did not attempt to enlarge upon the subject herself, but after a word or two on other matters turned to leave the room. But she was not permitted to escape. Curiosity had conquered Mrs. Cumloch's first impulse to be silent, and the fear, inspired by Harriet's controlled manner and her indifferent method of telling her piece of news, that her niece was not altogether happy, impelled her to make a parting comment on it.

"I'm so glad about it all, Harriet dear," she said rather timidly. "I was so afraid it was going to be that good-for-nothing Verney Ellis!" This last almost spitefully.

"Why do you say that — 'good-for-nothing'?" in chilling tones from the door.

Mrs. Cumloch could not say as she thought in her

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heart, “Because he has treated my darling niece so badly!” so she did n’t say anything.

“I’d rather you did n’t speak of him like that,” continued Harriet; “it is n’t just; and then, he is my friend”; but she added more sweetly, as if in concession to her aunt’s feeling that she had suffered at the young man’s hands, which though unspoken was yet perfectly apparent to the girl, “don’t worry about that, Aunt Lydia, I’m quite, quite happy.” And she said it as if she meant it, too. There are all kinds of happiness.

“I’m so glad,” murmured her aunt.

“Yes. And do you know something?”—with a serious air of making a discovery—“I don’t think any girl ever marries the man she thinks she wants to marry, as far as that goes!”

When she had gone, the older lady leaned back in her chair fairly weak with the emotion the news of Harriet’s engagement aroused in her.

“What character! what character!” she exclaimed, as the door closed upon her niece, “not to sit down under the blow, not to let disappointment prostrate her! To see that life after all offers more than one chance of happiness! That’s my niece, my more than daughter, my Harriet!” And she fell to thanking God for his goodness in letting the cloud that had threatened the clear sky of the girl’s peace of mind pass over her head and leave her unharmed.

The next person whom Harriet wanted to tell about her engagement was Verney; she was happy and she knew it would make him happy to know it; but two

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weeks passed without giving her an opportunity. In all that time she had not seen him, though Benton, who was doing devoted service, helping him with the business that was incident to the wind-up of the campaign, brought her news of him constantly, and she had heard from him once. Verney had dashed her off a hurried scrawl one day on paper with the heading "Regular Republican Organization" for proof of how hard he was pressed for time, just to say that they were going to elect their candidate for President by a large majority and carry the State for Ordway easily, although he did n't feel sure about the Attorney-generalship; and to assure her with evident satisfaction that his District was O. K., and everybody hard at work.

Although he could n't go to see her as he used to do, Verney took a melancholy satisfaction in the pleasures of friendship, now that their recent understanding had unequivocally established their relations on that foundation, and in telling her of his work, in which he knew her to be interested for i's own sake.

It was not to be wondered at, however, that Harriet was unable to get speech with Ellis, so engrossed he was with the closing days of the campaign. As a candidate on the Republican ticket and executive member of his District, his time had been filled to overflowing. That he was not actually deprived of all sleep was due to the able assistance of his self-constituted lieutenants, Tommy Beekman and George Benton, who shoulder to shoulder fought his fight with him every step of the way, and by taking the responsibility of minor details upon

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them, forced Verney to take a few hours' rest each night. Verney was very grateful to them, especially to Benton, who had been his faithful shadow — ready to run any errand, no matter how trifling, that would save his friend — ever since Harriet's supper party following Verney's great speech, and who was not a member of the organization as Beekman was, and had no interest in the outcome of the campaign except for Ellis's sake.

October the thirty-first found the last speech made and the campaign practically over. Sunday the first of November and the days before election were inactive ones for most people, devoted to bands and bets. For Verney, however, although it was only one of waiting to his friend Ordway, the day before election was the busiest of the whole campaign. When he was not with his District captains, his presence was required at Republican headquarters, which kept him moving about a great deal; and then, too, there was much detail to the business of distributing election-day literature, a large part of which work fell on his shoulders.

An enormous parade had been going by the windows of the Times Square Republican Club all the afternoon, where he was busy sending out thousands of little white ballot cards, blue slips with “Vote early” on them, and pink ones with instructions how to vote. This tremendous amount of work, which he had had to get through in the past week, had kept him for the last three or four nights from returning to his home to sleep, which accounted for the fact that he did not get a note Harriet had sent him some days ago, until Tuesday, elec-

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tion-day itself. He had come in very late the night before and did not look at his accumulated mail until next morning, when Wilson, who had been told to call him early, brought it up to his room.

It was just a line in her pretty handwriting to say that she had something she wanted very much to talk to him about and would he come in and see her as soon as he could? She knew it would be hard for him to get away, but she would n't keep him long, and any time would suit her. If he would let her know what hour and what day he could come she would be in.

Verney's brain was too full of the election and the possibility of defeat or victory even to guess what it was that Harriet wanted to talk to him about; but it was enough, so much did he think of her, that she wanted to see him at all.

He was very sorry that he had received the note so late and he told himself as he stuffed it in his pocket and hurried to headquarters that he would go that very day, election-day or not.

At five that afternoon the voting was over and he found time to telephone Harriet that he would be up at eight o'clock.

That would give him time, he thought, to see that the count was proceeding legally in all the polling-places of his District and that everything was being properly watched; and as the returns would only be beginning to come in at eight, he felt sure that he would have half an hour to spend with Miss Rand before they became really exciting.

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Harriet was therefore very much surprised when that hour came to have the Democratic candidate for Attorney-general shown into the upstairs sitting-room where she was awaiting Verney.

She surveyed Vandewater's form and dark face in amazement.

“Have n't you anything to do election night except to come and call on a girl?” she said, smiling and holding out her hand.

“Nothing so important,” said the young man, sitting down beside her on the divan in the window. But he looked at the clock almost involuntarily as if the time were indeed precious to him.

“Then you must either feel sure of winning or certain you're going to lose, one or the other. Those are the only reasons that could possibly account for your lack of interest in the returns!”

“Yes, except one other!”

He looked at her quickly, the color dark in his face, the blue veins near his temples swelling, and with an intensity that frightened her.

“And what is that?” she asked coolly, edging a little farther away.

“A greater interest in a girl,” declared Vandewater.

Harriet drew a long breath. She wondered whether he was going to ask her to marry him. He had sent her flowers, of course, and been more or less devoted, but other men had done that before, and the result had not always been the same. Some had ended by asking her, and some had not. She sighed. She should know

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the signs of a proposal by this time, she felt, if experience was the teacher it purported to be; but for all that she was quite in the dark as to whether the young man before her was really on the verge of one or not. She could only hope not. She hated to refuse people; and then, of course, it would be a particularly unpleasant task since she would be obliged to tell him that she not only did not care for him but that she did care for some one else,—for George Benton, as the case happened to be. A throb at her heart as she made this reflection told her how glad she was that this was true, that she did care for George Benton. It was such a safe, comfortable feeling!

“No, it’s because you think that you’re going to win that you were able to tear yourself away from hearing the returns long enough to come and see me to-night,” she began, striving by the lightness of her tone to bring the conversation back to less serious ground. “And it was nice of you, too! You knew, of course, that I was interested in your success!”

In her anxiety to accomplish her object she was saying more than she meant or felt, for, of course, she was not interested in his success as long as it meant Verney’s defeat.

“Yes, I do think I’m going to win!” agreed Billy Vandewater, rising and walking up and down agitatedly. “I think we’ve got ’em easy! But that is n’t why I came to-night,—because there was nothing more important to keep me; I came”—he stopped and turned toward her suddenly — “to ask you to marry me!”

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And then Harriet understood. She saw that this young man—for whatever reason, whether from enmity toward Verney, from ambition, or some other motive—wanted to win the election more than anything else in the world, although he thought he wanted more to marry her; and that he was at that moment convinced he would win; under which circumstances his vanity, of which he had more than the usual share of man, had demanded that he should win the girl too. A moderate success was not success at all to Vandewater. He must succeed overwhelmingly, or not at all.

It was evident to Harriet that although he might really care for her in his own fashion, it was more his desire to be all-conquering that had inspired him to ask her to marry him, and it was this ambition to be victorious over Verney in every field, both in politics and love, that had brought him to her that night. She was to be his crown of crowns, the topmost feather in his cap, gild his fine gold for him. And while she did him the justice to believe he was sincere according to his lights in his wish to marry her, this knowledge made it easier for her to wake him from his dream.

“I’m sorry, Mr. Vandewater,” she said rising, “very sorry to hear you say that, for I can’t possibly marry you; and if I have in any way given you reason to think I would, I must ask you to forgive me. I’ve been stupid enough not to realize that you wanted me to.”

She let him have it by degrees, the truth, allowing him to grasp the idea that she did not care for him before she broke the news that she did care for some-

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one else. It would be a blow to him, she knew, whether he cared deeply for her or not, for he was a proud, imperious man, whose great fortune enabled him to gratify every wish, and to whom the word "refusal" was a stranger.

The color died out of his face now. He fixed her with a long stare much more eloquent of anger and disappointment than words could have been.

"You can't marry me?" he repeated with an inflection almost of astonishment, as if he could hardly believe that such a thing could be happening to him.

"I'm afraid not," she said pityingly, his surprise was so ingenuous.

His dark, red-veined eyes roved over her, and he saw all at once how sweet and lovely she was, how desirable. He forgot all about the election and his hope of triumphing over his enemy in respect to this girl as well as in respect to the campaign.

"Why not?" he said, his voice shaken with real feeling. He was a man deeply in earnest now.

Harriet saw that she had not done him justice, complete justice, after all. He was capable of caring more than she had thought he could. Genuine compassion welled up into her Madonna eyes.

"Because I'm going to marry some one else," she said very gently.

The color rushed on a sudden back into Vandewater's face, the veins on his forehead stood out more alarmingly than ever.

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“Not — not — Ellis?” he said, the words coming with difficulty through his shut teeth.

“No, not Ellis,” Harriet said, and smiled faintly to see the instant relief that spread over his face; “I’m engaged to Mr. Benton.”

The blow was a severe one, but if it had to be, the young man was thankful that at least that mercy had been vouchsafed him, that he had been spared the intolerable sting of losing to the one man he hated to lose to, more than to any one else in the world. The thought enabled to take his leave almost with a light heart.

“My motor is waiting,” he said. “I had planned to bring you back to my office to hear the returns,—my mother and a lot of people are there; I’ve got a special wire, you know. If things had gone as I hoped, that is—” He regarded her gravely.

“It’s very kind of you,” faltered Harriet, more distressed for having upset his plan than for having refused to be his wife, and very thankful that he was going before Verney arrived.

She did not fancy the prospect of entertaining both the candidates for Attorney-general at the same time.

“It does n’t matter,” said the young man pleasantly and a little proudly. “Good-night.”

In the hall below as he was going out he encountered another man coming in, and recognized Verney, as the Politician, half an hour later than he had expected to be, breathlessly asked the butler for Miss Rand.

The two having been brought face to face in that way

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could hardly avoid speaking, and as they did so each surveyed the other with a hostility that was perfectly apparent even in the one word they gave each other, "Evening." There was also astonishment in both their faces, for each had believed the other to be at the headquarters of his party getting the returns, and it showed the unusual powers of attraction of the girl upstairs that both young candidates should have called upon her on election night.

As they stood eyeing each other a moment, a smile of exultation spread suddenly over Vandewater's face born of his knowledge that if Verney was on the same errand, which he could only believe to be the case, since he was not aware of the true inwardness of the situation between his rival and Harriet, and since no other errand seemed important enough to take a candidate for election from the scene of battle at that hour, it would be as fruitless as his own had been. And as he thought of that, Vandewater could almost have loved George Benton for being the man Miss Rand was going to marry.

The smile puzzled Ellis a little; and as he ran up the stairs to the sitting-room, glad in his heart that Harriet had not chosen to receive him in the library, which he had such good reason to remember unpleasantly, he wondered why it was such a triumphant one; but he at once forgot it when he found himself in the girl's presence.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, clasping her hand eagerly.

"Nothing," she said, as they sat down. "Did you

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think I sent for you only because I wanted something of you?”

“I hoped so,” he said simply; “I like to do things for you.”

“I know it, or you would n’t have come to-day when it was such a very important time. You were very good.”

“Tell me what you wanted to talk to me about,” he said, with a quick, direct look.

She gazed at him a moment with a tenderness that, if it could be said of so young and distinctly girlish-looking a girl, was almost motherly.

“I’m going to get married, Verney,” she said.

An exclamation that she did not exactly catch, but the nature of which she guessed was profane, escaped the young man, who started violently.

“Not Vandewater?” he said, remembering on the instant the look of triumph in his rival’s face when they met in the hall. His teeth closed fiercely on his lower lip.

“No,” she answered quickly, remembering for her part how the other man had said, “Not Ellis?” when he had heard the news of her engagement. She smiled a little to see how much alike men were after all, even the most unlike. “It’s George Benton,” she added.

“Ah!” Verney said, turning his face away; and then after a moment, “That’s good, that’s fine. He’s one of the best. I think the world of him.”

There was another pause. Harriet did n’t know why she found it difficult to speak, but so it undeniably was.

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"I was afraid," Verney continued, "it was the other. I'm awfully glad it is n't."

"So am I. But you know," she shook her head, "there was never any chance of that from the beginning."

They said very little more on the subject until in a few minutes Verney rose to go; then he took her hand, pressed it warmly, and the color rose to his high cheek bones and the bright blue of his eye dimmed.

"I am very poor at expressing myself," he said rather huskily, "but I want to say, what I want to tell you is that I wish you every happiness in life, and that I am gladder than I could possibly tell you that you're going to marry so fine a fellow as George Benton."

That was all he said, but Harriet knew what was in his heart — that while he was sincerely glad she was going to be married, he yet felt a little lonely, a little as if he had lost something himself.

"Will you promise me something," she said, "before you go?"

"Anything; what is it?"

She backed away from him, her hands behind her like a child afraid of its own audacity.

"You won't like it, it's a piece of advice," she warned.

"Go ahead, I would take anything from you!"

She came nearer and just touched his sleeve with one finger.

"Then here it is," said she solemnly: "Don't — let — women — spoil — you!" And as he started a little, "You know they do. They run after you and make

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up to you all the time, and if you don't look out they'll spoil you. Oh, Verney, do be careful!”—her voice grew more anxious — “I'm so afraid if you're not, it will interfere some day with your work, with your success in politics.”

He knew what she meant, and that it was true. Too great and too many intimacies with women had been the ruin politically of more than one man before now, and he nodded gravely in acquiescence.

Then astonishment overcame him. “But how did you know,” he asked surprisedly, “that they — that they —”

“That they spoiled you?” she finished for him, and laughed deliciously. “Why, how could I help knowing? You're so nice to look at!” But she had in reality told by subtler signs than that. He would have been surprised, perhaps, if he had known that so long ago as their talk together after Mrs. Cumloch's dinner in Lake Forest, at the very beginning of their acquaintance, the girl had discovered that the women he knew and liked, were very many, and the women who knew and liked him as many as the sands of the sea.

“Take care,” he advised, and laughing, too, “or you will be doing that yourself.”

“Ah, but I'm an old friend, a privileged friend. Is n't that different?”

He said it was. Her sweetness was beginning to be hard to bear.

“I must go,” he added; “it's after nine. The returns will be coming in fast now.”

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"How selfish I am," she cried, "to keep you! And oh, I do hope, I do hope you will win!"

She said it with all her heart, and Verney smiled radiantly.

"I think we will," he answered, his thoughts with the whole Republican party rather than upon the result of his own campaign for Attorney-general.

"And if you do, you know you will have no friend who will be gladder than I, don't you?"

He nodded, and then said consideringly,—

"Will it be that way, do you think, Harrie — after — after you are married?"

She looked at him with the greatest surprise.

"Why, yes!" she cried; "the only difference will be that then you will have two to be glad for you instead of one. George worships you now, you know, as it is. And we'll always, all three of us, be the best friends in the world!"

He smiled gratefully at her. "The best in the world!" he repeated, as if the words were a sort of talisman.

CHAPTER XXII

"I ALWAYS WANT MOST WHAT I CANNOT HAVE"

ONCE in the street again, Ellis stood hesitating, and then, in spite of the fact that he should have been at headquarters and that all the myriad and varied noises and excitements of election night in New York beckoned him, he gave the chauffeur of his taxicab Mr. Vernor's address and sped uptown.

He knew that his uncle, who had been laid up for a week with a sprained ankle, would be at home, and an overpowering need of sympathy compelled him to go, for he knew, too, that his uncle was the one person in the world whose sympathy would be welcome. Did he not care for Harriet too? That alone was reason enough, his nephew thought, for seeking the older man's society that night; although he could not have said himself in so many words what it was that he wanted sympathy for.

Mr. Vernor — who was sitting by a table loaded with books and magazines and election extras, with his bandaged foot on a chair, trying to read himself into forgetfulness of the irritating accident which had prevented him from going down to his club to get the returns — was very glad, indeed, to see his nephew, though not a little surprised.